

THE  
CAUSES  
OF THE  
DECAY OF CHRISTIAN PIETY:  
OR, AN  
IMPARTIAL SURVEY  
Of the RUINS of  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION,  
UNDERMINED BY  
UNCHRISTIAN PRACTICE.

Written by the AUTHOR of  
THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.

---

VOL. II.

---

EDINBURGH:

Printed by W. RUDDIMAN, J. RICHARDSON,  
and COMPANY: And Sold by the Booksellers  
in Town and Country.

M. DCC. LXV.



THE  
CAUSE  
OF THE  
BREAD OF CHRISTIANITY  
OF AN  
IMPERIAL SURVEY  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION



By  
J. H. ...  
...

# THE P R E F A C E.

1. **T**HOUGH this be the first Appearance this Tract has made in the World, yet its Being is of somewhat a more ancient Date, it having received its Lineaments and perfect Form some Years since, when the Author, not having Partiality enough to think it worthy publick View, had judg'd it, if not to perpetual Darkneſs, yet, at leaſt, to a long indefinite Suſpenſion from ſeeing Light. In this Interval, it is more than probable ſome Paſſages may have loſt much of their Propriety to the preſent State of Affairs, they having been adapted to Circumſtances which may ſince have received ſome Change: And herein I muſt beſpeak the Reader's Candor, to make ſuch Allowances as the Matter ſhall require; of which yet I ſuppoſe there will not occur very many, or very important Occaſions.

*The Time of writing this Treatiſe.*

2. But would God I were to apologize for a yet far greater Abſurdity, that our Scene were ſo ſhifted, that the whole Deſign of the enſuing Diſcourſe might become one entire Impertinence, and that our more eminent Conformity to the Rules of our Chriſtian Inſtitution, might ſuperſede theſe Diſquiſitions about our Failances and Aberrations. But, alas, I find I have pitched upon a Subject not like to be outdated, Vice daily gaining not only Strength but Impudence: Nay, we are not only become Witneſſes againſt ourſelves, by

*The Occaſion of publiſhing it.*

declaring our Sin as *Sodom*, but we have forced God also to attest against us, by punishing us in a Manner no less conspicuous and manifest. And surely then it is more than Time for us to take the Prophet's Advice, *Hag. i. 7. to consider our ways*, to reflect not only on those robust Giant-like Provocations which have thus bid Defiance to Heaven, but also to sift out those secret Incendiaries that have inflamed us to this mad Daring; to examine what that inflameable Bitumen, the untempered Morter is, with which we build our Babel, by discovering those Misperceptions and false Confidences wherein many of our other Guilts are founded; in order to which this slight Tract offers its feeble, yet well-meant Aids, being forced out of its Retirement, and, like *Cresus's* dumb Son, compelled to speak by Impulse of the present Exigent: And how despicable soever the Mite contributed be of itself, yet if it may provoke the more wealthy to cast in richer Gifts, it may prove no unprofitable Agent for the *Corban*. It is evident this is a Season which not only warrants, but exacts the most importunate Endeavours of persuading Men to those Things that belong to their Peace.

3. For although it is true, that *Sins of this* every State of Sin sets us also in a  
*Age aggravated from the* State of Hostility with God, yet our present Condition seems to have advanced us beyond the common Degrees even of that. It is, we know, high Insolence against a Prince to despise and violate his Laws, but when to that are superadded Contumelies, and designed Affronts to his Person, this is such an accumulated Outrage, as will vanquish the most resolved Patience. And this, alas, appears to be our Case; we have long indulged to ourselves the Breach of all divine Laws, gratified every Appetite, every Passion

## The P R E F A C E.

v

sion and Lust with the Forfeiture of our Allegiance, and as if this would not serve to render us irreconcilable enough to God, we are now grown to subjoin Malice to Licentiousness; project not so much to please ourselves, as to displease him; profess a Contempt not only of his Commands, but himself; and seek no less to dethrone him, than abrogate those. Thus have we made it a kind of personal Quarrel, and by those impious Blasphemies we daily dart against Heaven, do, as it were, dare the divine Majesty to vindicate itself. Whether his great Longanimity may have given our *Hectors* a Fancy, that they had vapoured God (as they are used to do Men) into a Tameness, I shall not examine: But his late Proceedings with us sufficiently testify that he means no longer to decline our Challenge. He now appears to avow the Enmity as openly as we have done; and has already given us competent Essays, how *fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, Heb. x. 31.*

4. It is true, indeed, that he has formerly owned his Controversy with our Land, and by a long Series of great and heavy Calamities attested himself the *God to whom vengeance belongeth, Psal. xciv. 1.* Yet as great Monarchs use to quell lesser Insurrections by their Lieutenants and subordinate Officers, but when the Rebellion grows high and desperate, then to encounter it in their own Persons; so is it observable here, that God then chastised, and tried to reduce us by inferior Instruments, found us out Lictors among ourselves, and made one Man's Sin the Punishment of another's: But now, as if he had the same Jealousy for his Honour which *Joab* had at the Siege of *Rabba* for *David's*, 2 Sam. xii. 28. as if he feared to be rivalled in the Glory of our Ruin, he takes us in his

*Greatness of  
our Judgments.*



own Hand, marks us out, as he did *Pharaoh*, to be the Trophies of his own peculiar Vengeance, appearing signally against us in all the dreadful Solemnities of an enraged Enemy.

*Particular Instances thereof, first of the Plague ;*

5. For first, has he not, as *Moses* speaks, *Deut. xxxii. 41.* whet his glittering Sword? Nay, has he not moreover (in the Scripture *Stile*) made it drunk with Blood? by sweeping away Multitudes of us in a raging PESTILENCE, which marched from one Part of the Nation to another, in a kind of triumphant Progress, as if it had received the same Mandate God gave *Abraham*, *Gen. xiii. 17.* *Arise, walk through the land, in the length thereof, and in the breadth thereof, for unto thee will I give it.* Whether it may not thus fatally complete its Course, notwithstanding the Halt it seems to make, and pass from our *Dan* to our *Beersheba*, is a Question that can with no Probability be resolved in the Negative; for as it is not to be doubted but there were in *Judea* as great Sinners as those on whom the Tower of *Siloam* fell, *Luke xiii.* that those who have hitherto escaped have an equal Share in the provoking Cause of the Judgment: So also that great Unsensibleness many of us shew of what others groan under, is a very ominous Abode, it being not only a dangerous Symptom, but a probable Means of drawing that Calamity to ourselves. When God sees we will suffer nothing by way of Consent and Sympathy with others, it is but equal we have our Part in a more direct and immediate Infliction, and feel what we would not compassionate.

*secondly, of the King.*

6. In the interim, although the present Respite from Destruction, and our own deceitful Hearts flatter

## The P R E F A C E. vii

ter us, and say, Peace, Peace ; we have all Reason to conclude, that God is not atoned, the Quarrel and Hostility goes on, and his *hand is stretched out still*, *Isaiah* v. 25. And so indeed we find it in other dismal Events. Slaughter, we know, is not the only Effect of War ; which, as it destroys the Lives of many, blasts the Supports and Joys of more. This Consequence of Hostility we find well expressed by the Prophet, *Joel* ii. 3. *The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness*, and herein also hath the Lord of Hosts, the great God of Battle, shewed himself mighty against us ; he has invaded us not only with Sword, but FIRE ; and in so stupendous a Manner desolated the Glory of our Land, that no human Fury could have procured, or even have wished the like Vastation and Ruins. *That city which was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces*, *Lam.* i. 1. *lies buried in her own ashes*, and is both Funeral-pile and Urn to herself ; and what neither foreign nor domestick Enemies could, in a Succession of many Ages, effect, one Blast of the Breath of his Displeasure, *Psalms* xviii. has performed in a Moment ; so verifying, even in a literal Sense, the Apostle's Affirmation, *Heb.* xii. 29. *that our God is a consuming fire.*

7. I shall not here assume the Politician's Part, and weigh the Detriment we have sustained by it in our civil Interest, of which, perhaps, nothing but Time and Experience can give us a full Estimate ; it rather suits my Design to observe what relates to our spiritual Concerns, whilst God's dwelling-places were involved in the same Ruin with ours, his own peculiar Portion not exempted, but as the Prophet complains, *Isaiah* lxiv. 11. *Our holy and beautiful houses where our fathers*

*The burning down  
of our Churches.*

*fathers praised him are burnt with fire* : This, though perhaps least considered, is sure not the least sad Circumstance, had only the Scenes of our Luxury, or our Fraud been destroyed, it might have sent us with more Fervency to the Places of our Devotion, and we might have frequented God's Houses the better, for being destitute of our own ; but when these also are made Parts of the common Heap, it is a sad Testimonial that our very Religion was provoking ; that that Pageant-like Piety which we deposited in our CHURCHES, only to make a Shew with on Holidays, served only to defile those holy Places, and render them so polluted, as required no slighter Purgation than that of FIRE. It is, we know, not long since those Mansions sacred to the Prince of Peace, were, even in the vulgar obvious Sense, made Magazines for War, but yet more so, in reference to that Pulpit Wild-fire, which set the Nation in Combustion ; whether that strange Fire which some of our *Nadabs* and *Abihus* introduced there, may not (even at this Distance) have done its Part to the drawing down this FIRE from Heaven, I leave to their serious Reflexion. But neither the *Hypocrite* nor the *Seditious* must *ingross* the Guilt of this Ruin ; the *Atheist* vies with both ; for, alas, what should God do with Temples among those, who pay him no Worship ? Or why should he let those sacred Monuments remain among them, to whom all Memorials of him serve but as Occasions and Incentives to blaspheme him ? They have long said with those in *Job*, *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways* ; and now it is but equitable (I had almost said civil) to take them at their Word, and no longer reside among those who avowedly disclaim him.

8. And this, it is much to be feared, may be the Portent of this dismal Vastation: We know Men use not to deface those Houses, where they intend to inhabit: And sure *this abhorring his sanctuary, and casting off his altar, Lam. ii.* is a dreadful Sign, that he means no longer to continue his Residence among us; indeed we find in Scripture that his Promise of cohabiting is always limited to those who own themselves his People; and therefore, when so many of us have openly renounced that Relation, we can with no Justice expect the Blessing appendant to it.

9. But perhaps this will seem to such no formidable Thing; *God's so withdrawing of himself is but agreeable to their Wishes,* a kind of quitting the Field to them, and so rather Matter of Complacency than Regret: But it is to be considered, that there is another Presence of God that will infallibly succeed this; when he removes that of his Grace, it is to make Way for that of his Anger; like the *Philistines*, we shall know the God of *Israel* is among us by his Plagues, *I Sam. v.* or to make a yet more dreadful Comparison, we shall, like the damned in Hell, discern his Presence only in the punitive Effects of it, and read his Nearness in our Sufferings. And sure this will be but an ill Exchange, even to the profanest of us, those that have most despised or loathed the soft Breathings of his Word and Spirit, will find it yet harder to endure the Whirlwinds of his Wrath, which will snatch from us those secular Advantages for whose Pursuit we have neglected *the-better Part,*



x      *The P R E F A C E.*

*Part, Luke x. 42.* and leave us as little of worldly Enjoyments, as we desired to have of spiritual.

10. Of this our late Calamities have given us a sad Prælude, and God knows how soon we may see the last Scene of the fatal Tragedy, it being too probable that this is God's last Experiment upon us, like the Causticks and Scarifyings to a lethargick Patient; if this bring us not to Sense, we are like to sleep on to Destruction: And alas, what uncomfortable Symptoms appear even in this Point also! Who is there that (unless awakened by his personal Concernments) seems at all to startle at the Noise of publick Ruin? When God, in Displeasure, threatened the *Israelites* that he would remit their Conduct to his Angel, and not go himself with them, the Text says, *They mourned, and no Man put on his ornaments on him, Exod. xxxiii. 4.* But now that we are given up not to a conducting but destroying Angel, what Signs of Remorse do we shew? What Vanity (I fear I may ask what Vice) have we subtracted, upon the Sense of God's Anger? What Nicety in Cloaths or Diet have we cut off in Sympathy with the Nakedness and Hunger of our afflicted Brethren? Nay, do not the unreasonable Jollities of too many among us, look as if we triumphed in their Miseries, found Musick in the discordant Sounds of their Groans, and our own Laughter, and emulated that infamous Barbarity of *Nero*, who played while *Rome* burned? It is mentioned by the Prophet as a most preposterous Thing, a Kind of impious Solecism, to revel under the Menace of Judgments, *Thus saith the Lord, A sword, a sword, it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter, it is furbished that it may glitter, should we then make mirth? Ezek. xxi. 9, 10.* and certainly it less befits us against whom God has not  
only

only prepared, but used his Sword; who are not only under the Threats, but actual Execution of his Vengeance: And what is it but interpretatively to prompt him to yet sharper Inflictions, by shewing him that these have not Edge enough to penetrate us? With how much Indignation God resents this perverse, this contumelious Behaviour, we may read, *Isaiah xxii. 12, 13, 14. In that day did the Lord call to weeping and mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth, and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine; eating and drinking, for to-morrow we shall die: Upon which follows that severe Denunciation: Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die. Of so deep a Tincture is this Guilt, that it is as lasting as our Lives, and, like the fretting Leprosy in the House, Levit. xiv. 45. can be removed by nothing but its Dissolution.*

II. O then let us not add *The Conclusion,* this to the Heap of our other *an Admonition to* Provocations, mistake Impudence or Desperation for *Repentance.* Courage; and frantickly defy that Omnipotence which we are sure we cannot resist: But since it has pleased God, even in Wrath, to remember Mercy, let us transcribe his Copy, be as kind to ourselves as he has been to us, and stop in our Career as he has done in his; not so madly affect a full Parallel with *Sodom and Gomorrha*, as to force him to destroy that Remnant, *Isaiah i. 9.* which alone distinguishes our Case; but rather take Pattern from *Nineveh*, cry, and cry mightily to God, join Humiliation to our Prayers, and Reformation to both. And could we be persuaded to do this with the same Sincerity  
and

and Universality, we might hope it may be with the same Success also: Would every one who has contributed to the accending, as industriously contribute to the appeasing of God's Wrath; would all who have brought their Fire-brands, bring also their Tears to quench them, as there would be no dry Eyes in the Nation at the present, so might it prevent as great a Generality of weeping ones for the future; secure us such a Tranquillity here, as may calmly convey us to that impassible State, *where all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, where there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, Rev. xxi. 4.*

---

# THE CAUSES OF THE DECAY OF CHRISTIAN PIETY.

---

## CHAP. I.

*The Character of Christian Religion, demonstrating its Aptitude to plant exemplary Virtue and Sanctity.*

I. **T**HE Holy Psalmist gives it as Part of the Character of pious Persons, and therewithal a Description of their Felicity, *Psal. xcii. 14. That they shall bring forth more fruit in their age* : And what he thus observes of the Members disjunctively and apart, Reason suggests to be in a higher and more eminent Manner applicable to the whole Body united : And it being as well the Mark as Duty of every single Christian to *grow in grace*, *2 Pet. iii. 18.* We may, by all Rules of Proportion, conclude, that the collective Mass of such, the whole Church, is by this Time near attained to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, *Eph. iv. 13.* And, indeed, this is so regular an Inference, that whilst the Premises stand firm, it is impossible to shake the Conclusion, the entire Body must necessarily augment answerably to the Growth of its several Parts. And if we

*Christian Piety ought to improve in proportion to the Time of its Growth.*

VOL. II. A should



should so far let loose to Speculation, as to forget our Experience, if we measure the Effect only by the Power and Energy of the Cause, we should surely be as far from doubting the Premises also. Christianity is in itself of so prolifick a Nature, so apt to impregnate the Hearts and Lives of its Profelytes, that it is hard to imaginé, that any Branch should want a due Fertility that is ingrafted into so vigorous a Stock.

2. For, first, in its Spring and Original it is most supernatural and divine, derived immediately from him, who had nothing more of Man than he purposely assumed to draw us the nearer to him as God. He it was that disseminated this Doctrine, and that in order to the *purifying to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*; and certainly his Choice abundantly justifies its Propriety to that End, and his Descent from Heaven on that Errand, puts so venerable a Solemnity upon it, that though his Descent were very astonishing, yet it will be much more so, that it should fail of the designed Effect.

3. And, indeed, did our Faith give us no Clue to lead us to the Author, yet its Composition would speak it to be of no human Extraction, its Precepts are so excellent and refined, so agreeable to the more spiritual Part of our Temper, and so apt, as to forestal, so to cleanse and sublimate the more gross and corrupt, as shews Flesh and Blood never revealed it. Nay, farther, so effectually providing for all those Advantages to Mankind, which the wisest of Mens Laws have in vain attempted, that methinks they all stand before it like the Magicians before *Moses*, and by their Impotence tacitely confess it to be the Finger of God. It were

were too large a Theme to confront them in the several Instances, let it suffice to observe one which has a common Influence on all ; and that is, the immaculate Cleanness of Heart, which Christ's, and only Christ's Law requires. This is the only proper Basis on which to superstruct, first Innocency, and then Virtue, and without this the most rigid Exactors of outward Purity, do but transcribe the Folly of him, who pumps very laboriously in a Ship, yet neglects to stop the Leak ; or the worse Tyranny of *Pharaoh*, in requiring brick without straw : So far is it from a Severity in our Law-giver, thus to limit and restrain our Thoughts, that it is an Act of the greatest Indulgence : By no means the laying on a new Burden, but the furnishing us with an Engine to bear with Ease that Weight which otherwise the stoutest *Atlas* must sink under. And were but this one Precept sincerely conformed to, it would not only facilitate but ascertain the Obedience to all the rest. If the first Sparks of Ill were quenched within, what Possibility is there they should ever break out into a Flame ? How shall he kill that dares not be angry ? be adulterous in Act, that did not first transgress in his Desire ? How shall he be perjured that fears an Oath ? or defraud, that permits not himself to covet ? In the like manner all positive Acts of Virtue are but the natural Effects of the interior Habit. Where the Love of God is seated in the Heart, it will operate in all the Faculties, keep them in a busy Endeavour of doing acceptable Service : When Fear is planted there, it will break forth into outward Reverence and Duty, and so proportionable it will be in every other Instance. It is therefore an Advice well becoming the Wisdom of *Solomon*, *Prov. iv. To keep the heart with all diligence* : But then it is withal the Work of him who is greater than *Solomon*, to teach us how to do this : For unless he keep

*that city, the watchman waketh but in vain.* If he instruct not to secure those Issues of Life, they will betray and ruine, appear indeed *the savour of death unto death.* Now of this divine Art of Tacticks and Defence, Christianity is the only School, and therefore most fitly qualified for the producing all those supernatural Excellencies, to which the timely Prepossession of the Heart is the Rudiment and Principle.

4. And as the preceptive Part enjoins the most exact and elevated Virtue, so is it most advantageously enforced by the promissory, which both in respect of the Kind and Value of the Rewards, and also the Manner of proposing them, is most exquisitely adapted to the same End.

5. For first, If we consider the Nature of the Things promised, we shall find they are not gross and carnal, such as may court and gratify the bestial Part of us; but such as are proportioned to the supreme and leading Principle, as to feast a Soul, and suit with the Capacities of an Intelligence. All the Beatitudes the Gospel tenders to its Votaries, either relate to the Purity or Peace of the Mind in this Life; or else to its completer Felicity hereafter. And though it is true, the Body is not wholly unconsidered, though the Addition of all temporal Necessaries be promised, yet even those are for the Soul's sake, either to secure it from the Sin of Solitude and Distrust, or to preserve it a useful Instrument for the other's Service. And as for the future Glory in which the Body is to partake, it is to be observed, that Flesh and Blood cannot inherit it; that Load of Earth which now engages to Corruption must be put off, must be calcined and spiritualised; and thus made glorious,

glorious, be clothed upon with Glory. So that in all the Gospel Dispensation, there is no *provision for the flesh*, its Lusts and Sensualities. And then sure there cannot be a more unanswerable Argument against our providing for it, than to see it left out of God's Care. Indeed, had we Proposals of a *Mahometan* Paradise, were we to expect our Bliss only in the satiating our Appetites, it might be reasonable here to whet them before-hand, to stretch them to the utmost Wideness, or, in the Prophet's Phrase, *to enlarge our desires as hell*, and by frequent Antepasts excite our Gust for that profuse perpetual Meal. Or were we only to have our Portion in this Life, to enjoy an uninterrupted Affluence of outward Comforts, it were but good Husbandry to improve them to the Height, and the Wise Man's Advice would then cease to be Irony, *Eccles. xi. 9. Rejoice, O young man, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and the sight of thine eyes.* Had we only the prospect of a *Canaan*, such an eternal Inheritance as a conquering Sword could give, as the Salvation of a *Joshua*, and the affluence of Milk and Honey could produce; it would be no Wonder if we never voluntarily endured the Thirst and Famine of the Wilderness, but be always, as they, desiring Meat for our Lust, projecting the gratifying those Desires in whose Repletion we placed our Happiness. But when our Religion makes us no such Tender, when all its Hopes are of another Make, invite to those diviner Joys of which Sensuality has no Capacity or Taste, what Pretence can we have to cherish that here, which we must wholly be divested of hereafter? Those immaterial Felicities we expect, do naturally suggest to us, the Necessity of preparing our Appetites, and Hungers for them, without which Heaven can be no Heaven to us: For since the Plea-



sure of any Thing results from the Agreement between it and the Desire, what Satisfaction can spiritual Enjoyments give unto a carnal Mind? Alas, what Delight would it be to the Swine to be wrapt in fine Linen, and laid in Odours? his Senses are not gratified by any such Delicacies, nor would he feel any Thing besides the Torment of being withheld from the Mire. And as little Complacency would a brutish Soul find in those purer and refined Pleasures, which can only upbraid, not satisfy him. So that could we by an impossible Supposition fancy such a one assumed to those Fruitions, his Pleasure sure would be as little as his Preparation for it was. Those Eyes which have continually beheld Vanity, would be dazzled, not delighted with the beatifick Vision; neither could that Tongue, which has accustomed itself only to Oaths and Blasphemies, find Harmony or Musick in a Hallelujah. It is the peculiar Privilege of the pure in Heart, *that they shall see God*; and if any others could so invade this their In-closure, as to take Heaven by Violence, it surely would be a very joyless possession to these Men, and only place them in a Condition to which they have the greatest Aver-sation and Antipathy. So that Holiness here, is not only necessary to the Acquiring, but the Enjoyment of Bliss hereafter: And therefore, unless Men will contrive to annihilate their Joys, and affect the monstrous Riddle of being tormented in Heaven, they cannot but from this Spirituality of the Promises, infer a Necessity of purifying themselves, and being capable at least of innocent celestial Joys; and since that only can be done by virtuous Practice here on Earth, the Obligation thereto must needs be very pressing and indispensable. And as the Nature of the Promises directs to this, so does the great transcendent Value encourage and animate. Hope is the grand Exciter of Industry,  
and

and as the Object of Hope is more or less desirable, so is the Endeavour more intense or remiss; and upon this Ground we must conclude the Christian has all Reason to be the most indefatigable, seeing his Expectations are the noblest and most encouraging. That they are so, we cannot but acknowledge, if we admit of the Description which the Spirit gives; that Spirit which as he seals us to it, so is himself the Earnest of that Inheritance. He in the sacred Scriptures has drawn up a Map of the Country which we are to enter: And sure we may say of it as *Caleb* and *Joshua* did of *Canaan*, *Numb. xiv. 7. The land is an exceeding good land.* For first, if we consider the negative Advantages it has, we shall find there is an Absence of all the ills destructive or affrightful unto human Nature. *There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, Revel. xxi. 4.* Here alas, we are infested by all these. Sorrow and Pain prey and insult on all the Comforts of our Lives; leave us not a Gourd, which is not like that of *Jenah*, smitten with these Worms: and then comes Death the grand Devourer, and spares not Life itself. Nay, those little Respite which we have from these are so imbittered by unpleasant Expectations and Presages, that we are sad before we are afflicted; in Pain without a Disease, and in Death in the Midst of Life; and then a State exempted, not only from the Calamities but the Fears of these, may well deserve to be looked upon with Appetite.

6. But Heaven is designed for our Reward, as well as Rescue, and therefore is adumbrated by all those positive Excellencies which can endear or recommend. It is a Crown, and that not of Thorns, such as our Saviour's was, and such as the more affected Diadems of the World oft prove unto

*Heavenly,  
glorious,  
eternal.*

unto the Wearer, but one of Glory : Nor is that Crown nor that Glory like our sublunary Splendors, which suddenly vanish, and leave the Possessors to the greater Obscurity and Contempt ; but it is permanent, such as fades not away, 1 Pet. v. 4. or in St. Paul's Phrase, *an eternal weight of glory*. But to give you its more comprehensive Character, it is *a being with the Lord*, 1 Theff. iv. 17. Nay, it is a possessing even God himself. *He shall be their God*, Rev. xxi. 3. and what can he want who possesses him who is all things ? How can he fail of the most ravishing Delight, that stands before him, *in whose presence is the fulness of joy*, and at whose right hand are pleasures, and those not short or transient, but for evermore ? So indefeasible is our Estate in those Joys, that if we do not, like mad Prodigals, sell it in Reversion, we shall, when we are once invested, be beyond the Possibility of ill Husbandry, not have in it any Power to undo ourselves. Now surely these are great and precious Promises, such as may well sustain the Weight of that Inference the Apostle builds upon them ; and engage us to *cleanse ourselves from all Filthiness both of Flesh and Spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God*, 2 Cor. vii. 1. for they address to that Principle which is confessedly predominant in our Nature ; so that if the Love of Christ cannot, yet the Love of ourselves may constrain us. How must it then affront and baffle the Enticements of Sin, when we compare its empty vanishing Pleasures with those solid and durable Joys ? What a forestalling will it be of Satan's Markets, that God bids so much fairer for us ; offers us that to which his *ταυτα παντα σοι δωσω*, *all this will I give* (could he make such a Wholesale) can bear no Proportion ; and how then shall we ever barter it away for those little petty commodities he retails to us, or make any other Reply to his Proffers than

# Chap. I. *Christian Religion, &c.* 9

than a *get thee behind me, Satan* ? For alas ! can we remember that we are Candidates for a Kingdom, and yet retain the abject Spirits of Slaves ? Do we expect to reign hereafter, and yet depose ourselves before-hand here ? suffer every the vilest Lust to rule over us ? Is so glorious a Prize annexed to the Victory, and will it not animate the faintest Heart, and feeblest Hands to the Combat ? What Lions can we fear in the Way which this Hope is not *Samson* enough to encounter ? How light are our heaviest, how momentany our most lasting Afflictions, if balanced with that *eternal weight of glory* ? Are we spoiled of our Goods ? Here is a Reserve of Treasure which no Thief, neither the sly, nor the avowed, the Pilierer, nor the Sequestrator can invade. Are we reduced to our Saviour's Destitution, not to have *where to lay our head* ? yet we have a *building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. Are we reproached for the Name of Christ ? that Ignominy serves but to advance our future Glory, every such Libel here, becomes Panegyrick there. Nay, are we persecuted to Death ? that sends us but to take Possession of the Crown of Life. Upon such sure Grounds does our Christianity set us. While we make good its Condition, it pulls out the Sting of all that is most deadly : And, in a more comprehensive Sense, possesses us of the Privilege promised the Disciples, *that nothing should by any means hurt them, Mark xvi.* the most adverse Chances being but like the Plowing and Breaking the Ground, in order to a more plentiful Harvest. And yet we are not so wholly turned off to that Reverſion, as to have no Supplies for the present ; for besides the Comfort of so great and certain an Expectation in another Life, we have Promises also for this ; even of all those internal and spiritual Satisfaction which attend the Practice of Piety. The  
Feast



Feast of a good Conscience is the true Christian's daily Diet ; and sure, whatever the rich Men of the World think, he only can be said to fare deliciously : Nay, he has yet more supernatural Food, Manna rained down immediately from Heaven ; the Holy Spirit sent on purpose to refresh and support him ; those Joys which differ rather in Degree than Kind, from those which are to be his final Portion. And that the Soul may not be too much incommoded in her House of Clay, there is Provision made for that also, such Necessaries secured to the Body, as may keep it in tenantable Repair : We have Christ's express Promise for it, that *to those that seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things shall be added* : If not that Superfluity which may oppress and load, (render the Body rather the Tomb than Mansion of the Soul) yet such as may sustain and support us ; and sure it is easy to decide which is the happier Lot. In short, we are sure enough to defray the Charge of that Voyage, which lands us at eternal Bliss : And certainly he must be of a very sluggish or querulous Humour, that shall demur upon setting out, or demand higher Encouragements.

7. And as the Nature and Value of the Promises render them most proper Engagements and Incentives to all Virtue ; so if we consider the Manner of Proposing, we shall find them in that respect also highly contributive to the same End. For first, they are clear and express, not wrapped up in dark enigmatical Insinuations, wherein Men must exercise their Sagacity as well as their Faith ; but revealed with that Plainness, that it is impossible for any who knows but the Letter of the Gospel, to be ignorant of the eternal Reward it proposes. And herein the Deference belongs to Christianity above all other Religions, some whereof have

have left Men so much in the dark, that many Sects among them have denied the Immortality of the Soul; and sure there were but faint Encouragements they could propose unto that Virtue which was to perish with them. What should animate them to the rugged severe Tastes of restraining Appetites, subduing Passions, eradicating Habits, who discerned no Rewards for blameless Souls? It is true indeed, Virtue is in herself perfectly amiable, though she brought no Dowry, but Experience shews us she has not many Platonic Lovers: And when so few are ambitious to wed her, when she brings an eternal Inheritance with her, we may easily guess how little she will be sought without it. When Men once conclude that their Spirits shall vanish into the soft Air; the Inference is very obvious, *Come on, let us use the creatures as in youth*, as we find it elegantly pursued, *Wisd. ii.* But of those who acknowledged a future Being, their Perceptions were very misty and obscure. The Heathens had such confused Notions of their Elysium, that the Epithet of Shades belonged more properly to the Darkeness than the Refreshment, and was a Reward fit for the Votaries of those ambiguous Oracles they consulted. And proportionably to the Obscurity of their Hopes were the Exercises of their Virtue; their Piety was even overwhelmed and confounded by the Multitude of their Deities; nay, which is yet stranger, their Gods themselves seem to have been lost in their own Crowd; else sure the *Athenians* would never have inscribed an Altar to the *unknown God*: And indeed their Offices were generally such, as if they had been devoted to no other, they having as little discerning of their Worship as of their God. It was wrapped up in Clouds and Darkeness; had mysterious Recesses to which the common Worshipper had no Admittance; such as were to require a Veneration

tion only by not being understood : And though this must needs deprive their Services of that Spirit and Quickness which constitutes the Virtue of Devotion, yet alas, their Religion had more than that negative Contrariety to Virtue. Many of their Worshipps being nothing but a Solemnity of the foulest Vices ; and their Divinity taught them to violate Morality : A Deceit Satan could not probably so long have triumphed in, had they had the Gospel Notion of Heaven ; for sure they could not have supposed their Gods of such mutable Inclinations, as to affect Purity in their Cohabitants, and Pollution in their Votaries, or such incongruous Dispensers of Rewards, as to apportion an impeccable State hereafter to the most flagitious Criminals on Earth.

8. As to the *Jews*, it is true, they derived their Light from a clearer Fountain, were under the Oeconomy of immediate Revelation, and therefore might be supposed to have had a freer Prospect into that Heaven from whence their Law descended, yet even they were in this, as in many other Particulars, under *Moses* his Veil, had rather dark *Adumbrations*, and those too overwhelmed with the Multitude of express temporal Promises. The earthly *Canaan* lay so fair and open to their Prospect, as easily intercepted their View of the Heavenly ; and their Faith must remove, at least overlook, that Mountain, before it could come to any Sight of the Horizon and extended Sky. Nay, when it is remembered that the Sadducees a great and learned Part of their Doctors denied all future Being, we must think the Intimations of it were very obscure ; it being scarce imaginable, that any considering Men should think the Soul expired with the Body upon any other Ground, but that they knew not what After-state to assign

assign it. So that though they wanted not Figures and Shadows, or as the Apostle calls them, *patterns of heavenly things*, *Heb. ix. 23.* yet they seemed not to have been well understood, and the Generality of Men were not only in their Persons, but their Understandings, denied Entrance into the Holy of Holies; penetrated not that mystical Representation which was within the Veil: And answerable to this Dimness of their Perceptions, was the whole System and Body of their Religion, which rather entertained itself in those external bodily Performances which affected the Sense, than in those divine and spiritual Raptures, which purified and elevated the Soul. It is the Apostle's Affirmation, *Heb. ix. that the sacrifices there offered could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience,* and he gives the Reason in subjoining, that they stood only in *meats and drinks, and carnal ordinances.* Alas, what Propriety had all their legal Purifications towards the cleansing of the Mind? That might be in the Mire while the Body was in the Laver; and while the Surface of the Man was sprinkled with Blood, the Heart might be more bestial than those Creatures who lent the Ablution. And indeed if we consider their Morality, we shall find that outside formal Ceremony had proceeded to infect and poison that also. The outward Restraint, the bare Forbearance of an actual Commission, being by them thought a full Compliance with all the negative Precepts: So that we see Christ is fain to assert the internal Part of the Obligation, and extend the Duty to the Thoughts and Inclinations. Besides, those Acts of Virtue they performed were commonly such as had an Aspect, rather on their temporal Well-being, than distant and unseen Rewards; their Justice and Charity confined to their own Nation, directed to the flourishing of their own



Commonwealth; whereas Aliens were devoted to their Rapine and Despite, so that if they were Virtues, they were rather political than moral; and, indeed, while they placed so much of their Hopes on Earth, looked on secular Plenty and Tranquillity as their Reward, it was but consonant they should square their Endeavours by that Measure, and consider Things not simply in their native Properties of Good or Ill, but according to their Tendency towards that they esteemed their Felicity.

9. But God has provided, as the *Promises* Apostle says, *Heb. xi. 40. better things* better in *for us*, has not only made a better Covenant with us, but has *established it* their Nature, and in *upon better promises*, Chap. viii. 6. the Terms of given us clearer Revelations, not only of our Duty but our Recompence; Assurance; the Veil in Christ is done away, and we all with open face, behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, 2 Cor. iii. 18. The Gospel puts the Evidences of our Inheritance into our own Hands, sealed by his explicit and direct Promise, who cannot lie; and that not only engaged by way of Munificence, but Bargain and Contract, as the Purchase of that Price, which our Redeemer fully paid in our Behalf. And sure this is, in the Apostle's Phrase, *strong consolation*; and if so, it must be forcible Enticement likewise: He cannot but run with Alacrity, who has the Prize in his Eye, nor can St. Paul use a more pressing Argument to his *Corinthians*, *To be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*, than this Assurance, *That their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord*, 1 Cor. xv. 58.

10. And as this clear *are conditional, and therefore engage us to Holiness*; Proposal of the Promises is most proper to encourage

encourage and inspire our Endeavours, so is the Conditionality most efficacious to necessitate and engage them. Had Heaven been only promised as a Largeſs, and with a blind promiſcuous Bounty diſpenſed without Diſcrimination, how much it might have raiſed our Gratitude, I know not, but ſure it would not have excited our Industry, which, in all Inſtances, we find is whetted by Intereſt; and where that is otherwiſe ſecured, Men generally eſtimate it a Part of the Benefit, that their Labour is ſuperſeded, and pleaſe themſelves no leſs in a lazy Bequeſt than a full Enjoyment. So that, indeed, it is this Circumſtance of the Promiſes that muſt give Life to all the reſt, and make them operative toward the producing of good Life; for admit the Joys we expect never ſo divine and ſpiritual for their Kind, never ſo great and tranſcendent for Degree, and theſe alſo repreſented to us in the moſt clear and convincing Manner: Yet if they be tendered not as Objects of our Choice, but the Certainty of our Fate, Felicities which we are only concerned to enjoy, but not to acquire, they may make us glad, but ſurely not diligent; it being but a cold Inducement to any Undertaking to be aſſured, it is perfectly needleſs: We have therefore all reaſon to confeſs it our greateſt Advantage towards Virtue, that God has ſo linked our Hopes and our Duty together. And, indeed, when we conſider the great Diſproportion between the one and the other, the Infinity of the Reward with the Deſpicableneſs of the Service, we muſt reſolve that he had no other Deſign in making his Promiſes conditional, than to engage us by our Intereſt to that Holineſs to which he ſaw our Inclinations did not bind us; that it was an Artifice of his Love to enſnare us into two Felicities by propoſing of one, enforce us to take one Good in the Way to another, Virtue in Paſſage to Glory.

are also enforced by  
Menaces of  
Punishment ;

11. And indeed who would not think this Method so invincibly efficacious, as might supersede the Necessity of any other, but God, who understands our Thoughts long before, *Psal. cxxxix. 1.* foresaw that notwithstanding this Proposal of a *Canaan*, there would be *Reubenites* and *Gadites*, who would set up their Rest on this Side of *Jordan* ; so intent on the Commodity of their Cattle, as to be content themselves to be Part of the Herd, and *become like the beasts that perish* : That there would be Men of so ignoble, disingenuous Tempers, as none of these Cords of a Man would be able to draw ; and therefore there is another Part of the Gospel-economy fitted to their Capacities, the Threats and Intimations, those Terrors of the Lord, which, as Goats, may drive those brutish Creatures who will not be attracted ; that those who think themselves perfectly unconcerned in *David's* Question, *Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord, Psal. xxiv. 3.* may yet startle at *Isaiah's*, *Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings ?* Of so formidable a Kind are those Menaces, as is sufficient to awake the most drowsy stupid Soul, and are most apt to operate upon that Part of their Temper, which evacuated the gentler Method ; that very Sensuality which made them despise Heaven, may help to enhance the Dread of Hell ; the Lack of a *drop of water* will be most insupportable to him who fared deliciously every Day ; those Flames will be yet more scorching to those Bodies, who by studious Effeminacies and Softness have superadded an artificial Tenderness to the natural ; nor will the *gnawing of the worm* appear more intolerable to any, than those who here make it their Business to tie up its Jaws, gag or stupify that Conscience which would now admonish,

month, but will there torment. And when to this is added the Perpetuity of these Pains, that *the worm shall never die, the fire never be quenched*, certainly this puts such an Edge upon the Terror, as may well make it, in the Apostle's Phrase, *quick and powerful, searching even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow*, when we are assured that *the ax is thus laid unto the root of the tree, and that every tree that brings not forth good fruit must be hewn down and cast into the fire*, we shall sure be warned to bring forth *next fruits of repentance, and fly from the wrath to come.*

12. But because neither Invitations nor Threats can avail with those who *are assisted* are any way invincibly impeded, to *by supernatural Aids* apply them to their Benefit; since the most glorious Prize, the most formidable Danger, is insignificant to him, *in the Performance of Duty.* who wants Power to run unto the one, or from the other; it has pleased God to inspirit and actuate all his evangelical Methods by a Concurrence of supernatural Strength, makes it not only eligible but possible, I may say easy and pleasant for us to do whatever he commands us; and notwithstanding our natural Debility, makes us, through Christ which strengthens us, *able to do all things*: By his Spirit he prevents, assists, restrains, excites, comforts, convinces; gives Grace, and adds to that the happier Largess of a Will to use it, and Knowledge to discern the Want of more; infusing to the Soul an ardent Thirst of greater Powers, and readier Means of Service, which the Performance actuates to greater Strengths, and yet enflames to new Desires, and more importunate Pursuits, which God at once bestows and crowns his own Donations, still giving unto him that has, till that at last he give himself, and *grace is swallowed*



*up in glory.* And to assure us of this Aid, he has been pleased to oblige himself; descends to the Solemnity of a Pact and Covenant; has indented with us, and constituted it a principal Part of the new and everlasting covenant made with mankind in the blood of the Son of God, to send the Comforter, his Holy Spirit, to be with us till the end of the world, and do all this. So that the Gospel is at once the Assigner of our Tasks, and the Magazine of our Strength; so much Spirit goes along with that Letter; so much internal Grace is annexed to its outward Administration, as will to all, who do not resist it, infallibly render it *the power of God to salvation.* For it is not the sole Privilege of a St. Paul, but the common Portion of all Christians, *That God's grace shall be sufficient for them;* which is sure a more Gospel-like Promise, than that it should be too strong for them; so violent and irresistible, as to commit a Rape upon their Spirits; such a mighty Wind as drives them headlong upon Duty. Indeed this Competency is, of all other Proportions, the most incentive to Industry; we see, in Temporals, too little makes Men desperate, and too much careless; and certainly it would be the same in Spirituals: But now when we have Stock enough to set up with, and that too of so improvable a Nature, that is capable of infinite Advancement, and yet, on the other Side, no less capable of total Decay also, it being given with this express Condition, that upon Neglect it shall be withdrawn: So that our own Sloth may make us poor, but nothing else can keep us from being abundantly rich: What can be imagined more animating to Diligence and Endeavour? And this being the Condition wherein our Christianity has placed us, added to the former Considerations, will, beyond Exception or Subterfuge,

Subterfuge, evince its perfect Aptitude and Fitness for the End to which it was aimed, *the planting and nourishing all true virtue among men*, the introducing the Tree of Life into the World again, and so forming us a Paradise even amidst the Briars and Thorns of our exiled State.

---

C H A P. II.

*The Character of Christian Mens Practice, shewing their multiplied Failance, both from the Rule of that holy Profession, and its genuine Effect.*

I. **A**ND now who can suspect that a Cause so rightly disposed, *Difficult to* should miss of its Effect? that this so *resist the* auspicious Planet should be counter- *Force of* influenced by any malevolent Star? or *Christianity.* that what has so many Tenures in us, should be finally diseased? For, admit we have not the Piety to be prevailed upon by the Reverence of the Author; yet the Excellency of its Composition does so much recommend it to our Reason, that we must put off the best Part of our Nature to evacuate the Force of our Religion: Nay, supposing us to have done that too, to have struck ourselves out of the List of Rationals, yet if we keep but the Rank of Animals, if we have not extinguished Passion and Sense, it descends even to them; addresses to our Hopes and Fears with most importunate Solicitations, and convincing Motives: So that unless we have the absurd Ill-luck to have much of the Stoick, and nothing of the Philosopher, it will be impossible to resist its Impressions: And sure he that contemplates this, will be apt, with some Confidence, to conclude Christendom to be the *Goshen* of the World,

World, not only in respect of its Light, but of its Immunity from all those Locusts and Caterpillars, those Swarms of mean and fordid Vices which both coyer and devour the rest of the Earth.

2. But this must be the Inference of  
*Degeneracy* a mere Contemplative, a Recluse that  
*of Christi-* converses only with his own Medita-  
*ans :* tions : For let him be so much secular

as once to look abroad, the most transient Glance will serve to unravel all his hopeful Speculation, and shew him that Christendom may be as much Heathen as *America* : Whereas it is usually said, that ill Manners produce good Laws, we have reversed the Aphorism, and our good Law has introduced the most corrupt Manners. Our holy Faith, which like a Foundation should support good Works, has, like a Gulph, swallowed them up. And so universal a Depravation is there among us, that we have scarce any thing left to distinguish us from the most barbarous People, but a better Name and worse Vices.

3. And here, what Terms of Wonder or of Grief can be significant enough to express or bewail so strange and so perverse Degeneracy, that the Light of the World should thus  
*Their Lives* darken it ; the Salt of the Earth be  
*contrary to* the Means of putrifying and corrupting it ? That  
*their Pro-* those who were by God drawn out from the Hea-  
*fession.* then World, should so outvy the Gentiles Crimes, as if they had forsaken them, only because they were too innocent ? This, indeed, is one of Satan's subtlest Stratagems, to fill Christ's Camp thus with his Soldiers, by whose intestine Treacheries, he has been more triumphant than by all his open Assaults and avowed Hostilities. What a late Statesman said prophetically (if we may judge by the Event)

of

of England, that it was a vivacious Animal that could never die except it killed itself, is no less true of the Church, which has always been invulnerable against all Darts, but what have been taken out of its own Quiver. Of this the primitive Times were pregnant Testimonies, where all the most witty Cruelties, the most bloody Persecutions, never made any Breach in her: But she stood firmer for all those Batteries, and, like an arched Building, became more strong and compact, by that Weight which was designed to crush her: But the Vice of Professors undermines her very Foundation, and does as much exceed the Destructiveness of the most hostile Assaults, as intestine Treachery is more ruinous and fatal than foreign Violence.

4. As long as the Lives of Christians were the Transcripts of their Doctrine, they rendered it venerable to all, and gave a Presumption there was something more than human in it, that could work such signal Effects, that could so transform Men as to make the Adulterer chaste, the Drunkard temperate, the Covetous liberal, the Contentious peaceable. This, this was the Way to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, as the Apostle speaks, *Tit. ii. 10.* And then the Rule of Contraries directs us to conclude very distant Effects from our now so distant Practices, that our very Religion should partake of the Infamy of our Lives, and be thought rather a Mystery of Iniquity than Godliness.

5. Thus is Christ wounded in the House of his Friends, and has more Reproach cast on him by those that profess his Name, than by the loudest Blasphemies of those that oppose

*Admirable  
Lives of  
Primitive  
Christians.*

*Religion suffers for the  
Wickedness of  
its Professors,*



it. For when those who have not Opportunity to examine our Faith, see the Enormousness of our Works, what should hinder them from measuring the Master by the Disciples? It being scarce imaginable that any one Sect of Men should so universally run counter to all the Rules of their Profession: For let any sober Heathen look upon Christendom, as it is at this Day, weltering in the Blood, not of Martyrdom but of War, and will it be possible for him to think it owns a Gospel of Peace? or that those who so perpetually do those Outrages they are unwilling to suffer, profess Obedience to the Royal Law of *Love thy neighbour as thyself*, James ii. 8? Can he see the Violence and Oppressions, the Frauds and Underminings, the busy Scramblings for little Parcels of Earth, and yet believe we count ourselves Strangers and Pilgrims in it, and have laid up our Treasure in Heaven? Can he observe the strange and almost universal Distortion of Speech, whereby it has lost its native Property of being Interpreter of the Mind, and under intelligible Words so far exhibits the *Babel* Confusion, that no Man understands another's Meaning? and can he imagine we have any such Precepts as, *Lie not one to another*, or any such Penalty upon the Infringer, as *exclusion from the new Jerusalem*? Shall he hear our God mentioned more frequently and earnestly in our Imprecations than our Prayers, and every Part of our crucified Saviour, re-crucified in our horrid Oaths; and shall he not think that his second Executioners bear him as little Reverence as his first, or that he has given no such Command as, *Swear not at all*? When he discerns Self-preservation bowed to as the supreme Law, can he ever dream of another so inconsistent Obligation as that of *taking up the cross*? or that *suffering for righteousness sake* is one of our greatest Felicities, when he sees us run so affrighted from

from it, that no Crime, Perjury, Rebellion, Murder, is Block enough in our Way to stop our Flight? In fine, when he considers how much of our Business it is, first to excite, and then to cloy the Flesh, to spur it on to Riots, even beyond its own Propensions, that the whole Year is but one mad Carnival, and we are voluptuous, not so much upon Desire or Appetite, as by way of Exploit and Bravery: When, I say, he considers this, can he possibly guess our Institution directs us to beat down the Body, to mortify the flesh with the affections and lusts, interdicts us all rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, and all provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof? Certainly all Rules of Discourse will direct him to the quite contrary Conclusion. And when he sees a Set of Men that have enhanced the common human Pravity, he will be apt to infer their Principles have taught them the Improvement: And upon that Supposal he wanted not Temptation to his Option that said, *Let my Soul be with the Philosophers.*

6. And while we thus misrepresent our holy Profession to others, it will *and is con-* be no Wonder if we finally do it to *temned* ourselves, that we forget its native *thereby;* Shape, and look on her only in the ugly Dress ourselves have put on, and that Effect seems already too visible among us: Our Lives have so long confuted it, that we triumph over it as a baffled Thing, and like *Annon*, loath it because we have ravished and defiled it. Many of us take notice of the better Morals of *Turks* and *Infidels*, not in Reproach of ourselves, but our Religion, and because we have so many Lepers, think *Abana* and *Pharpar* better than all the Waters of *Israel*; this is openly in the Mouths of many, but is so prodigiously irrational, as well as unjust, that one can scarce

scarce think it possible to be in their Hearts, unless they be pursued by the Fate of habitual Liars, that, at last, come to persuade themselves.

7. Certainly there is no other parallel Instance wherein Men conclude *ought not to be charged with their Guilt.* so perversely : He that shews a Man that Precipice upon whose Brink he stands, that intreats, yea importunes him to retire from the Danger, nay,

bribes him with the greatest Rewards to choose Safety, has done all that can be expected from a Friend, or charitable Man : And if, after all, the wretched Person so advised, shall cast himself headlong upon Ruin, assuredly no Inquest would return his Murder in any other Form than that of *felo de se*. And why then should our Christianity be accused of those Ills which it would infallibly avert, if our Obstinacy would permit it ? Indeed the Charge is so wild, that it seems rather designed as an Artifice of Diversion, a Sprout of that first Fig-tree which was to hide the Nakedness of lapsed *Adam*. Men think it Policy to transfer their Guilts, and are willing the Violence of their Lusts should pass for the Impotence of their Religion. Like irregular Patients blaming their Physician for those ill Accidents which they know owing only to their own Unruliness. A pregnant Testimony of the reproachful Nature of Sin, that Men are content to betake themselves to the most forlorn Shifts to avoid the owning it ; but the Consciousness is so pressing and intolerable, that, with many, it drives on to yet higher Outrages : It is not enough for Men to decry their Christianity as a feeble insignificant Thing, but they load it even with contradictory Imputations ; and that which sometimes they call *the foolishness of preaching*, to bring it in Scorn and Contempt, shall at another be stiled an Art and Trick, to bring it into Suspicion

Suspicion and Hatred, be arraigned for Imposture and Deceit, a Project of imposing upon credulous Souls, and gaining real Advantages to the Managers, while they feed the silly Profelyte with imaginary ones. How groundless a Calumny this is, as it appears from the Sanctity and eminent Simplicity of Christian Religion, which, above all things, excludes Fraud and Falsehood; so also from the Designs and Aims of its first Promulgators, who, as they cannot be supposed dextrous enough to lay such a Scene of taking Pageantry; so all their visible Acquests were Scourgings and Imprisonments, Persecutions and Death. If this were the Case, it would indeed go near to reconcile the before-mentioned contradictory Imputations, whilst the imposing upon credulous Souls, at this dear Rate, would be in very Deed *the foolishness of preaching*, the greatest Madness in the World. Men of common Reason would be ashamed to use such frivolous Cavils; but who can, without Horror, hear them from professed Christians? That while Infidels are modest in their Reproaches, look upon our Doctrine only as erroneous, Disciples should be bitter, and charge it as insidious and treacherous? Thus does the Church experiment the Truth of her blessed Lord's Predictions, and finds her *foes are those of her own house*: And though she be Christ's Dove, yet is subjected to the Fate of the Viper, and has her Bowels torn out by those that spring from them.

8. These are the growing Consequences of resolute Impiety, he who will not be kept within the Bounds of Duty, seldom contents himself with that bare Violation: He not only *breaks the bonds in sunder*, but *casts them away too*; is impatient they should keep a Reputation to up-

*Principles  
of Religion  
now called  
in question,*  
braid



braid him, when he has robbed them of the Power of restraining him : And this sure is the Bottom of all that deep Reasoning, by which Men have learned to argue themselves and others out of their Creed : And though this be indeed the great Arcanum, the Philosopher's Stone they aim at, yet they have met with another good Experiment by the way ; and have, by I know not what Chymistry, extracted a Reputation out of these most unapt Materials. He passes for a considering Man that disputes Principles, and is thought most to own his Reason that least owns his Faith ; and then it will be no Wonder if this Success animate, and give them not only Confidence, but Vanity, to avow what is thus creditable.

and disbelieved by many. 9. Indeed, Satan is too subtle a Manager to lose this Advantage, and the Event sadly shews, he has not neglected to improve it, as appears not only by the Number of such Pretenders unto

Reason, but even by their advancing to higher Degrees. The Voluptuary, who likes his Portion in this World, and fears that in another, is at first only prompted by his Interest to quarrel the last Article of the Creed, and so, in his own Defence, denies the *Life everlasting* : But when he finds his Necessity made a Virtue, and himself struck into the Repute of a Wit ; upon that Account he doubts not, his Fame will increase with his Irreligion, and so proceeds still to unravel farther, till, at last, he leaves not so much as, *I believe in God* : That many have advanced so far is too evident, and by some so owned, that they will not thank his Charity, that shall hope better of them.

*Atheism gets ground of Religion.*

10. It was once the Triumph of infant Christianity, that it silenced all the Heathen Oracles, and within a while demolished even the Synagogue

nagogue too : But alas, its mature Age gives us that Effect in a most inverted Sense ; it now has served to suppress even the common Notions of a Deity, turned out the one as well as the many Gods, and instead of Polytheists and Idolaters, has made Atheists, and that which Christ tells us was designed *to perfect and fill up the law*, has, by the strange Pravity of its Professors, at once obliterated both Law and Lawgiver out of Mens Minds, thereby exemplifying the old Axiom, *Corruptio optimi est pessima* ; and the Saint, as well as the Angel, if he desert his Innocence, commences Fiend and Devil. These are such sad, such direful Transmutations, as excite not so much Wonder, as Grief and Lamentation ; and what Rivers, what Oceans of Tears are competent to bewail such unutterable Evils ?

II. The Removal of the Candlestick is so formidable a Judgment, that the Threatning of it is used by Christ as the most awakening Menace to the seven Churches, *Rev. ii. 5.* but the removing it by our own Hands is yet an Enhancement of that highest Calamity ; when Men are come to such an insensate Obduration, that they court their Plagues, become their own Lictors, and make that their Choice which is their extremest Punishment, they are certainly too secure of that Ruin they call for : And may we not fear it may prove general, and involve us all ? that while so many cry out to be delivered from their Christianity as their Load and Pressure, and so few express their Dissent to that Demand, God may in Judgment grant it, hearken to those that cry loudest, rescue his Gospel from our profane and impious Violations, and give it to others that may bring forth the Fruits of it.

*Removal of  
the Gospel  
to be feared  
thereupon.*

12. Nor is this to be feared only from the explicit Importunities of the Blasphemous, for it is interpretatively the Vote of many others; whoever give themselves up to the Dominion of any Lust, do implicitly renounce their Obedience to Christ, and say, *We will not have this Man to rule over us.* And when he is thus deposed from his regal and directive Power, we have Reason to believe he will despise a mere titular Sovereignty, not suffer the Sceptre of his Word to remain as an empty Ceremony among those who pay it no real Obedience; nor be again clothed with Purple, crowned, and saluted King, to advance the Triumph of his Scorn and Crucifixion.

*Our Hypocrisy may hasten it.*

13. Nor will the fawning Professions of the demure Hypocrite avert, but accelerate this Fate: He that makes the golden Sceptre in Christ's Hand, a Rod of Iron in his own, that thinks his Saintship licenses him to all the severe Censures, and the yet severer (because more effective) Oppressions of others, he is certainly to be looked on not only as a Rebel, but an Usurper too, and is, of all others, the highest Provoker. He that tramples under Foot the Son of God, does not so much violate him, as he that pretends to erect him a Throne upon Blood and Rapine, on Perjury and Sacrilege: Nor does he that accounts the Blood of the Covenant an unholy Thing, so much profane it, as he that uses it as a Varnish to paint over his foulest Lusts. The Apostle has long since told us, *There is no concord between Christ and Belial*, and can we think he will be patient thus to be made subservient to his Enemy? or suffer his Ark to be set for the Support, which should be the Confusion of *Dagon*? Do we find him so severely upbraid the Hypocrisy of the Jews, that *stole, murdered, committed adultery, and swore falsely, and yet came and stood before him in his house*, Jer. vii. 9. and

and shall we hope he will connive at it in Christians? Was it intolerable Profanation in them to account his House a Den of Robbers, and shall we be permitted to make it so? They are sent to *Shiloh* to read their own Destiny, and surely we are as likely to find ours there too; to be deprived of those Advantages which we have so unworthily used: Nor can we expect, that though God cause the natural sun to rise still as well on the evil as the good, yet that the Sun of righteousness shall continue to shine on those who will only bask themselves in his Rays, grow *Æthiops* from his Neighbourhood, but will not work by his Light.

14. When all this is considered, what a sad Abode does it make? *God's Patience provoked by these Sins.* When the Blasphemies of the Profane, the Sensualities of the Voluptuous, and the Mockeries of the Hypocrite, send, as it were, daily Challenges to Heaven, we cannot but look it should at last overcome its Long-suffering, awake God to vindicate the Honour of his Name, and not suffer it any longer to be thus prostituted and polluted: That when he sees his Light serve only to aid us the more subtilly to contrive our Deeds of Darkness, he should withdraw it, smite us with Blindness like the *Sodomites*, whom he finds in such impure Pursuits: And were that Blindness such as our Saviour speaks of, *John ix. 41.* that inferred the no Sin, it were a desirable Infliction, but, alas, it has none of that Property: That which is designed for the Punishment can never be the Extenuation of our Guilt; but as in Hell there is an unhappy Separation of Effects, the Scorching of the Flame without the Light, and the Blackness of Night without the Rest: So in this nearest Approach to it, this Portal to those Chambers of Death, there is the Ignorance



without the Excuse, the Darkness divested of its native Quality of Hiding: And when we are entered among Heathens here, we must yet expect the sadder Portion of apostatized Christians hereafter.

15. And O that this Consideration *Which Repentance only can appease.* might at last have its proper Operation, rouse and awake us timely to prevent those Evils which it will be impossible to cure: That by bringing forth some more genuine and kindly

Fruits, we may avert that dismal Sentence, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?* That Men would generally lay to Heart both the Sin and Infamy of being Promoters of publick Ruin; and quench that Fire with their Tears which their Sins have kindled, that the Fasting and Prayers, the Sighs and Groans of the Primitive Christians may supplant the profane Luxuries, the carnal Jollities of the Modern; and that Sackcloth and Ashes may become the universal Mode, the only fashionable Dress among us. This both Reason and Religion suggest as Matter of our most importunate Wishes; would God our Hopes were but half as pregnant.

16. But the less Appearance there *Every Man to amend one;* is of this universal Reformation, the more jealously ought every single Person to look on himself, lest he be one that obstructs it: For so he does who stays till it be a Fashion, but neglects to contribute his Part to the making it so. Men are willing to discourage themselves from Attempts of this kind, and with an unseasonable Modesty can reflect what a nothing one Man is to so many Millions, when, alas, all that vast Empire Vice has got in the World, is founded in the Pravity of single Persons, and would certainly be ruined by their Reformation. The more reasonable Collection would be, that he that considers himself

himself but as one, should not suffer himself to grow into less; to fall from that Unit to a Cypher, by permitting Sloth or Cowardice to enfeeble and emasculate him; but, on the contrary, should recollect his Spirits, actuate all his Strength, and therefore be sure to do his utmost, because that utmost is but a little.

17. And to this certainly there want not Encouragements. We see, in common Affairs, the Wonders that Industry and Resolution are able to effect, and a single Courage being exerted, has often, without Romance, overcome giantly Difficulties. It is a great Prejudice is cast upon Virtue by the Pusillanimity of those that like, but dare not abet her. When most Men commit all Impieties daringly and openly, and those few that do mourn for it, do it but in secret, the Example of the one is contagious, but the other has no Means to diffuse itself. Would Men stoutly own Duty, and not, like *Peter*, follow *Christ* afar off, they might yet hope to make a Party and gain Ground in the World. And how noble an Attempt were this, thus to encounter Satan in his highest Triumph, and recover a lost Field? And methinks those who have any Warmth of Piety glowing within, may easily thus improve it into a Flame, *ἐπιχορησσαι ἐν τῇ πίσει τὴν ἀρετήν*, add to their faith virtue, as that signifies Courage; and then readily would succeed that Train of Christian Excellencies reckoned up by St. *Peter*, 2 Epist. i. 5. knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and superstruck on these, as it there follows, brotherly kindness, and the most comprehensive Charity. We should be not only devout towards God, but zealous towards Men, endeavouring, by all prudent Means, to recover them out of those Snares of the Devil, whereby they are taken Captive. And since among  
all

*and take  
part with  
Religion;*

all those Snares there is none more entangling, than the Creditableness and Repute of customary Vices, to set themselves especially against that overgrown Covering and Ornament ; those Locks wherein its great, its *Samson*-like Strength lies, and strive to render it as condemned as it is base : And to this Purpose nothing is so apt, as the exalting its Competitor, fetching Virtue out of the Dungeon, that Darkness and Obscurity wherein it has long lain forgotten, and by making it illustriously visible in their own Practice, put it into the Possibility of attracting others. Indeed there only it appears in its true Splendor, they are but dead Colours the sublimest Speculation can put on it, he that would draw it to the Life, must imprint it upon his own. And thus every pious Person may, nay ought, to be a *Noah*, a Preacher of Righteousness ; and if it be his Fortune to have as impersuadable an Auditory, if he cannot avert the Deluge, it will yet be the providing himself an Ark, the delivering, yea, advancing his own Soul, if he cannot benefit other Mens.

and inter-  
ceed with  
God on its  
behalf.

18. Nay, this being a *Noah*, may qualify him to be a *Moses* too, give him such an Interest with Heaven, that he may be fit to stand in the Gap to be an Intercessor and Mediator for a provoking People. And, God knows, never any Generation more needed that Office ; nor any Part of this, more than our sinful Nation, which having long been in the Furnace, is indeed now come out, but so unpurified, that we have all Reason to expect a Return ; and that not upon the former frustrated Design of refining, but upon that more infallible and fatal one, of consuming us. This is so dreadful, but withal so just an Expectation, that if there be any *Jacobs* among us ; any who can wrestle and prevail with God, there never was so pressing  
Need

Need of their Intercession. O let all that are thus fitted for it, vigorously undertake this pious Work; let no *Moses's* Hands ever wax heavy, but be always held up in a devout Importunity; let them transcribe that holy Oratory, which he so often effectually used, plead to God his own Cause, with a *What wilt thou do to thy great Name?* And when there is nothing in us that can pretend to any thing but Vengeance, ransack God's Bosom, rattle his Bowels for Arguments of Compassion, repeat to him his own Titles, that he is *long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, Numb. xiv. 18.* and by these solicit, yea, conjure him to Pity. And how great an Ardency is required to this Intercession? What strong Cries must they be that shall drown so loud a Clamour of Impieties? And how does it reproach the Slightness of our sleepy heartless Addresses? Can we hope to bind God's Hands with Withs and Straws? To arrest his Vengeance with such faint and feeble Assaults? And when Nature and Danger suggest to Heathen *Nineveh*, not only to cry, but cry mightily to God; shall the Superaddition of our Religion damp ours into a Whisper, a soft unaudible Sound? A Storm will teach the profane Mariner to pray in earnest, and alas! we have not wanted that Discipline. It is not long since we might have said with those, *Acts xxvii. No small tempest has long lain on us, neither sun nor stars in many days, nay in many Years appearing, nothing but black and dismal Portents of a final Wreck to a poor weather-beaten Church, and then sure it was Time to be importunate, to learn so much of Instruction from the Waves that tossed us, as to make our Prayers keep Pace with them, in swift uninterrupted Succession, in loud and not to be resisted Violence. That we did so then, I dare not affirm, but sure I am, the Necessity*



sity of it is not yet out-dated ; for though the Sky, however black with Clouds, carries no Thunder in it ; though the impetuous Winds that blow from every Quarter, should not break out in Tempest, and bring Shipwreck to us ; yet we too fully exemplify the Truth of the Prophet's Axiom, *That the wicked are like the troubled sea, that cannot rest* : We have within us a Principle of Ruin, which can operate, though nothing from without excite it. A Tempest is not always necessary to sink a Ship, one treacherous Leak may do it in the greatest Calm, and what Security can there then be to our torn Vessel, whose Rents our continued Divisions do still keep open ? Indeed our Preservation must be as our Restoration was, the Work of Omnipotence ; thither therefore let us address with St. Peter's pathetick Prayer, *Save, Lord, or we perish*. O that all who are concerned in the Grant of that Petition, would qualify themselves to present it ; lift up such pure Hands, *that God who hears not sinners, John ix.* may yet hear them, afford a gracious Ear, and give an Answer of Peace.

## C H A P. III.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from Inconsideration.*

*Occasions of the foregoing Unhappiness, and,*

I. **T**HE last Section having defeated all the promising Hopes of the former, by shewing us how sadly we have frustrated all the Designs and Engagements of our Profession ; enervated all those apt and powerful Methods, and how perfectly contrary our Practices are to our Rules, mere Curiosity would more prompt us to enquire what are the hidden Causes

Causes of those so strange Effects; what unhappy Propriety there is in the Soil, that after so much Culture and Husbandry it should produce nothing but wild Grapes; and by what Arts and Wiles Satan has not only evaded, but even retorted those Blows which were aimed at him. But, as in Diseases the Pains and Languishing are obvious to the grossest Sense, but the Springs and Originals of them most frequently lie deep, and are so complicated and interwoven, that they require much Art to search and to distinguish them; nay, do often mock the most subtle Inquisitor, and send him back with mere Conjectures and uncertain Guesses: So, in this epidemick spiritual Distemper, the Malady is notorious and visible, but the Causes of it not so easily determined, yet that not so much from the Darkeness as the Number of them; so many do pretend, and that with very good Colour, to this unhappy, this monstrous Birth, that a *Solomon* himself must have made the Proposal of dividing it, as not being able to have assigned it entire to any one Mother.

2. Indeed so many are the Concurrents towards it, that it would far exceed the Limits of this little Tract, but to point at them: I shall not therefore undertake any such exact Enumeration, but shall only take notice of those which either for the Generality or Degree of their Efficacy appear the most eminent.

3. And, first, the great and stupid Inconsideration which most Men *first, of Incon-* have concerning their Religion, may *sideration.* well pass for a main Cause of its Frustration. Christianity may make *Archimedes* his Challenge; give it but where it may set its Foot; allow but a sober Advertence to its Proposals, and it will move the whole World: It comes with most invincible and controuling Arguments, but still they are

are Arguments, and those must first obtain Attention, before they can force Assent; they will most infallibly weigh down the Scales, though the whole World were the Counter-balance; but then that must presuppose their being put into those Scales; their being entertained with so much of Deliberation, as may try and examine their Weight. In a word, they address to us as Men, that is, Creatures endued by God with rational Souls and discursive Faculties; but if we will suppress these, and set up only the Brute to give Audience, we must not expect *Balaam's* Prodigy should be every Day repeated, that the Beast should be wiser than the Rider, and consequently cannot wonder if the Success vary with the Auditors.

4. And it is to be feared, that this *Religion taken up upon trust.* is the State of most of us, that all the convincing Logick, that *demonstration of the Spirit*, as St. Paul calls it, and all the persuasive Rhetorick of the

Gospel, find us so stupid and unconcerned, that they can make no Impression: All the Avenues are so blocked up, that they can find no Way of approaching us. We are like the *Indian Serpents Philostratus* mentions, Proof against all Charms, but such as with their glittering Splendor assault our Eyes: Nothing moves us but what courts our Senses, and what is not gross enough to be seen, we think too nice to be considered. The Form and Name of Christianity Men find ready to their Hands, and it costs them no Labour to put it on: But should they be interrogated of the Import and Significancy of it, I fear many would be at a Loss what to answer. Men call themselves Christians as they do *French* or *English*, only because they were born within such a Territory, take up their Religion as a Part of their Fate, the Temper of their Climate, the Entail of their

their Ancestors, or any thing most remote from their Choice; the Profession of it descends to them by way of Inheritance, and, like young careless Heirs, they never are at the Charge to survey it, to inform themselves either of the Issues or Revenues of it; what Burdens it lays, or what Advantages it promises. Every Man sees they are vast Multitudes that have entered the baptismal Vow, and I fear no small Numbers of them, that weigh it as little when they should perform it, as they did when they made it; have no other Notion of Baptism, but as a Custom of the Place, or a Time of Festivity; consider no farther Significancy in these spiritual Bands, than they do in the Swadling-cloaths of their Infancy, and can give no better Account why they took on them Christ's Livery, than why they wear such Garments as the common Fashion of their Country prescribes them.

5. This is, in many, the Effect of gross Ignorance, that really know nothing that borders upon Religion: And where that is the Principle, we cannot think it strange to see their Practices proportionable; this returns them into the State of Heathenism, and while they walk in that

*Peoples Ignorance proceeds from want of pious Education in some;*

Darkness, it is no Wonder if they often fall: The only Matter of Admiration is, that there should be any such Darkness among us; that *the glorious light*, as St. Paul terms it, *of the Gospel of Christ*, should not long ere this have dispelled it out of our Horizon, and certainly, that it has not, must be owing to some very great Guilt, so that concerning such Persons the Disciples Question, *John ix.* is very pertinent, *Who did sin, this man or his parents?* Where Men are so ignorant, it must necessarily infer their Parents Negligence in infusing, or their



own stubborn Perverseness in resisting Instruction : But it is more probable to conclude the former ; since, if Children were early instituted, Knowledge would insensibly insinuate itself, before their Years had armed them with Obstinacy enough to make head against it ; but when, by the Parents Remissness, the proper Seed-time is lost, the Soil grows stiff and untractable, the Labour of Learning averts their Childhood, and the Shame of it their Manhood, and so they grow old in their Ignorance, are ready to leave this World before they come to know any thing of that which is to succeed it. This is a common, but, certainly, a most deplorable Case ; and as it loudly accuses those Parents, who thus wretchedly hazard their Childrens greatest Concernments, so certainly it reflects not very laudably upon those, who by slighting that excellent Order of Confirmation in this Church, have, besides all other Advantages of it, robbed them of that happy Reserve, which the Care of their spiritual Parent had provided to repair the Negligence of their natural ; but Guilt has a miserable Kind of Infinity, and lessens not by being communicated ; and therefore, though these unknowing Persons may, with Justice enough, accuse others, yet can they never the more absolve themselves. Indeed they cannot tax others Omissions towards them, without a tacit Reproach of their own : For if it were a Fault in the Parent, to let their Infancy want those necessary Infusions, it is surely so in themselves to let their riper Years continue in that Destitution. And sure it is not probable there could be a more irrational Motive to the former, than that which prevails with the latter, to wit, the Fear of Shame, which certainly much more properly belongs to him that lies stupidly under his Want, than he that industriously sets to cure it : So that while they go thus preposterously

roussly to avert Reproach, they invite it; nay, and do besides betray one of their most important Secrets, discover themselves more solicitous about Appearances than Realities, to be thought knowing than to be so. A strange Kind of Speculative Hypocrisy, which yet leads to all the practical Profaneness incident to those, *who live without God in the world.*

6. But would God the uncatechized were the only Persons we had to complain of in this Matter: There is another Sort as ignorant, who have not that Plea; who by a wretched Inconsideration, have made a Shift to unlearn what they had once been taught. That this is naturally very possible no Man can question, that observes how Desuetude will rob a Man of any Science, or other Habit. But, in this Case, there is yet a farther Concurrent towards it; Christ's Parable tells us of *fowls that devoured the seed*, which himself interprets to be the *wicked one*, which caught away the Word sown in Mens Hearts: When that spiritual Seed lies loose and scattered upon the Surface, and is not by deep and serious Meditation harrowed, as it were, into the Ground, it offers itself a ready Prey to the Devourer, and God knows the Event is too ready to attest the Truth of the Observation: For do we not see many whose Childhoods have wanted nothing of Christian Nurture, that have had all Advantages to the making them *wise unto salvation*, yet suffer their Manhood to wear out and obliterate all those Rudiments of their Youth, and that not only out of their Practice, but even out of their Memory too; this (would we be patient to have the Experiment made) would, I doubt not, be found true in divers, and they would appear less able to approve themselves, not only to

*and personal Sloth and Negligence in others;*

the Confessor, but even to the Catechist in their adult Age, than they were in their Minority; as having scarce ever thought of the Principles of their Religion, since they conned them to avoid Correction; and then it is no Wonder if they pass into the same Forgetfulness with other the Occurrences of that slippery Age.

7. But if with some the Memory  
*and Want of* have been so invincibly faithful, as  
*making a* not to have resigned its Depositum,  
*particular* if it do happen obstinately to retain  
*Application* those early Impressions which were  
*of the Ar-* made on it; yet, alas! that alone  
*ticles of our* will be of little Avail. It is true,  
*Creed.* that is the Store-house, and it is  
 good to have that well replenished;

but if its Plenty be only within itself, uncommunicated; if the Granary, though never so full, be sealed up, it gives no Security against a Famine: A Man's Remembrance of his Creed may tell him there is a God, and that he is Almighty; but if his Reason be so much asleep, as not to infer from thence the Necessity of reverencing and obeying him who is all-powerful to revenge our Contempts, he may repeat the Article every Day; and yet nevertheless atheistically. In like manner, he may go on to the Birth, Death, and Resurrection of Christ; but if he weigh not the Obligations to Gratitude and Duty, which devolve on him from thence, he may remember his Birth, and yet never be regenerate; his Death, and yet not *die to sin*; and his Resurrection, and yet lie rotting in his own Corruption, and not rise with him to *newness of life*. So he may proceed to his *coming to judge the quick and the dead*: But if he reflect not on his own particular Concernment in it; if he consider not that *for every the secretest thing, Eccl. xi. God will bring him,*

*him*, as well as others, *to judgment*; he may talk of Doomsday as Men do of such Assizes as they have no Tryal at, but it will never set him a trembling, or give him the Providence to anticipate his Sentence; so judge himself here, that he may not be judged of the Lord; and so proportionably in all the Parts of our Christian Faith: He that does not extract from them their proper and just Inferences, shall never feel their Efficacy. He has, indeed, in that excellent System, a most infallible Catholicon, against all his spiritual Maladies; but it is a Medicine, not a Charm; to be taken, not laid by him; and if he fail in Application, he will as certainly miss of the Cure: And this gives us one too clear a Reason, why *so many*, in the most fatal Sense, *are sick and weak among us, and fast asleep, are first lethargick, and then stark dead in trespasses and sins.* Men do not, by sober Consideration, suck out the Virtue which would heal them: They look on the Creed as Christ's Badge, and so long as they bear that, they think none must question their Christianity; whereas it is indeed more properly his military *Symbolum*, or Recognition of the Cause and General they fight for; an engaging them to all the Obedience, Fidelity, and Constancy of resolute Soldiers; and to this Purpose it is that we stand up at the Recital of the Creed, as owning our baptismal Promise, to fight manfully under our Saviour's Banner, against Sin, the World, and the Devil; and if we do not thus, it is not material what Professions we make, we are the same Deserters whether we stay in our own Camp, or run over to the Enemies; throw away our Arms, or not use them; renounce our Christian Faith, or not improve it. Sloth is as mischievous in War as Treachery or Cowardice, and he that keeps his Sword in the Sheath, is as unformi-



dable an Enemy, as he that brings none into the Field.

8. And how many such insignificant *Christians* Combatants are there in the Christian *grown too* Camp, that only lend their Names to *careless and* fill up the Muster-roll, but never dream *secure,* of going upon Service? It is certain there are as many such, as there are careless unconsidering Professors; and these, it is to be feared, make so great a Number, that were the Church put to estimate her Forces, and examine what effectively her Strength is, she would find the Deceit of false Musters as great among the Spiritual as the Civil Soldiery. It is, indeed, a most amazing Thing to see, that that which is the one great and important Interest of all Men, should, of all other Things, meet with the least Regard. If we make a Proposal of worldly Profit, though incumbered with many Difficulties, and liable to many Uncertainties, we shall not only have an attentive Hearing, but active Care and diligent Pursuit of the Design; it will be driven to the last Glimpse of Hope; and if the first Attempt miscarry, the next Occasion is laid hold of; but here, where the Prize is so rich, the Conditions so easy, the Acquest so certain, yet (as if these were deterring, averting Qualities) we cannot be got to take the Matter into our Deliberation. Alas, what stupid Folly has possessed Men? and by what Measures do they make their Estimates? How are their precious Souls become so vile in their Eyes, that they are the only Part of them which they think below their Regard? In an epidemick Disease, every Man looks out for an Antidote or Medicine for his own Peculiar, and does not acquiesce in that silly Confidence, that he shall do as well as other Men; yet, in this greater Danger, that is their avowed Comfort, and keeps them

them as chearful as if they had the most solid Grounds of Security. Alas, can Numbers outface Damnation? or do Men hope, that by going in Troops to Hell, they shall master the native Inhabitants, subdue those Legions of Tormentors, and become Conquerors instead of Sufferers? This is sure too wild an Imagination for any to entertain, yet what more sober one can any pretend, in favour of so stupendous an Improvidence?

9. But it will be much more seasonable to reform than apologize or rhetoricate; and therefore, it will import those Men, who, like the Inhabitants of *Laiſh*, dwell careleſs, quiet, and secure, to look about them; to enter into serious Consultation how they may avert that Ruin which waits upon such a supine Temper; not to suffer themselves to perish in the Midst of such Possibilities, nay, Solicitations to be saved; but at last afford an Audience to that Embassy which is sent them from Heaven. Ponder well those easy Terms of Reconciliation which are proposed; the inestimable Advantages consequent to the embracing that Amity, and the as inestimable Detriment of refusing it: In a word, not to please themselves with the empty Title, but to penetrate the full Purport and Significancy of their Christianity; and when they have done this soberly and attentively, having removed this first and most general Obstruction to Piety, they will find themselves assaulted by such Force of Reason, that they must either be very ill Logicians, or very good Christians.

## C H A P. IV.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from partial Consideration.**Partial Con- sideration.*

1. **N**EXT to the stupid and merely vegetable State of total Incogitancy, we may rank that partial and piece-meal Consideration, by which Christianity is mutilated and deformed, deprived of all its Force to attract and subdue Mens Hearts; for, as in artificial Movements, there is such a Dependence of one Part upon another, that the subtracting of any one destroys the whole Frame; so in this spiritual Machine, designed to raise our dull Mortality to Heaven, the divine Wisdom of its Maker has combined its several Parts, that he who severs, ruins; he that applies it not in its united Strength, will find no Aid from its unjointed scattered Particles. St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. xii. that in the natural Body, the making it all Eye, or Hand, the reducing the many Members to one, is destructive to its Being; (if they were all one Member where were the Body, Verse 19.) and we, in Reason, must expect the same Event will follow here. If we advance one Part of our Christian Faith to the Annihilation of the rest, it is impossible that should supply the Place of the whole; but the more that Member is swoln above its native Size, the more unwieldy, not the more strong it grows; and loses that active Vigour, which is received by a social Communication with the other Parts.

2. It is God's Charge against the *Touching the* Priests, Mal. ii. That they have been *Promises of* partial in the Law, נְשִׂאִים פְּנִים, *Lifters up of Faces* in it; preferred *God.* some more agreeable Parts, and dis-  
countenanced

countenanced others ; were not only Judges of the Law, but unjust Judges too. And I fear the Indictment may now run more generally against the People also ; that they have been partial in the Gospel ; culled and chosen out those softer and more gentle Dictates which should less grate and disturb them ; like well the Oil that makes them have a chearful Countenance, but are not so forward to deal with the Wine which should search and cleanse their Sores. We make all our Addresses to the Promises, hug and caress them, and in the interim, let the Commands stand by neglected. A Divinity indeed fitly apportioned to the Devotion of these Times, which loves to make an *offering to God of that which costs them nothing*, and yields a Preference to that Way of Worship which assures Salvation best cheap, and at the easiest Terms ; but would Men consider, they would find, that the Commands are the supreme and most eminent Part of the evangelical Covenant, the Promises come but as Handmaids and Attendants, an honourable Retinue to invite the more respectful Entertainment ; and it should be remembered, that of this sort are the Threatnings too ; and therefore they have surely an equal Right to our Regard, especially when many of them have the Accession of God's Oath to bind and strengthen their Performance. And what a scandalous and absurd Partiality is this, that when the Precepts come with this Solemnity, the more to command our Reverence we single out this one Part of the Train, and pay our Homage unto it ; lay hold on the Promises, not those that speak Damnation to Impenitence, but the other Half of them which give Assurances of Favour ; and like the *Benjamites* to the Daughters of *Shiloh*, run away with them, possess ourselves of these by Rape, in spite of all the Incapacities.



pacities we lie under; though God has sworn, that no disobedient Provoker shall enter into his Rest.

3. That this is really the Case of many is more than probable; for by what other Artifice is it possible for them to reconcile their large Hopes, with their no purifying; their confident Expectations of Heaven, with their greedy rapacious Pursuits of Earth; their secure Dependence on the Blood of their Saviour, with their remorseless Effusions of that of their Brethren? Did they consider the inseparable Connexion between the Precepts and the Promises, it were hard for them to be so wicked, but impossible to be so sanguine. Did the unclean Person believe, that none but *the pure in heart shall see God*, if he could be so much Swine, as still to choose the Mire, yet sure he could not expect to be rapt from thence into Heaven. Did the Drunkard consider the Sentence of the Apostle *excluding all such from the kingdom of God*, 1 Cor. vi. 10. If he can be content so sadly to over-buy this Sin, as to pay that Kingdom for his Shot, yet certainly even he cannot be soot enough to expect the Possession of what he has so sold, or hope that from one of his drunken Trances he shall awake to Glory. Did the covetous Extortioner observe that he is involved in the same Sentence, remember that *such Violents shall take, not heaven, but hell, by force*; if the Terrors of the Lord could not have Force enough to melt his Bowels, to unclutch his griping Hand, or disseize him of his Prey, yet sure it must discourage him from grasping of Heaven too, from hoping to defraud God as he has done Men, and striking himself into an Estate in the Land of the Living: And, in like manner, all other hoping Sinners, if they would ruin, yet must cease from flattering

tering themselves, must choose Damnation bare-faced, and not fancy that their posting on in the broad Way shall ever bring them to Life. And sure this Discovery of their Estate, were a very good Step to the curing it: For though it is possible some few may be of so sturdy an Impiety, as to choose their Sin with all its Consequents, yet sure all Sinners are not of that strong Complexion, and therefore Satan is put to his Wiles and Artifices, is fain to hoodwink those that are apt to start; and disguises the Danger when he sees the true Appearance of it will terrify and avert. This was his old Policy with our first Parents; he dazles their Eyes with the glorious, but abusive Proposal of becoming like Gods, that they might not discern how near they were approaching to become like Devils; and this under the Pretence of Confidence and Friendship, discovering, as it were, a Secret to them, that God envied them that Promotion which his greater Kindness was solicitous to procure for them. And as if the Ruin of Mankind, in *massa*, had been too slight a Trophy for that one Stratagem, he repeats it again to the Individuals, persuades Men that the Path of Obedience, which God has chalked out, is strait and narrow, rugged and incumbered; that there is a shorter Cut, an easier Passage to Life; that they may be led into *Canaan* a nearer Way, step into it immediately from the Flesh-pots of *Egypt*, and escape the tedious weary March in the Wilderness, never so much as call at Mount *Sinai*, or be affrighted with the *thunders of the law*. In a word, they need not *work out their salvation*; but be they never so slothful, *they may inherit the promises*, *Heb. vi. 12.* This is his own grand Conclusion, though he has several Mediums to infer it by, wherewith, as with so many Tools and Engines, he furnishes Men for the filing or breaking of that sacred

facred Link between Duty and Reward; and of these he has great Variety, fitted to the Hands and Skill of those that manage them. I shall not undertake to ransack his Work-house, or give an Inventory of his Utensils, but shall rather, in general, beseech all those who have made this unhappy Separation, to remember from whose Forge they took their Instruments, and then consider whether his Officiousness in supplying them, can argue any thing but that it is his Work they are about. Can any think that he, whose eternal Pastime it will be to torment Men, can really be solicitous of their Ease; that he would choose out for them the *pleasanteest paths*, were it not that he knows they lead to the *chambers of death*? When Christ, whose sole Business it was to save Mens Souls, has prescribed us a Course which shall assuredly conduct us unto Happiness, what can it be but Frenzy to resort to *Abaddon*, the Destroyer, for an easier Method, or expect more Gentleness and Compassion from the *roaring lion*, than from the *Lamb of God*?

4. Nay, indeed, this is not only  
*and doubt* to attribute to him more Tender-  
*of his Faith-*ness, but Fidelity too: To believe  
*fulness.* him in opposition to all the express

Affirmations of God; and when he, who is Truth itself, has told us, that *except we repent we shall all perish*, Luke xiii. 6. and that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14. to disbelieve this only upon his bare Credit, who was a Liar from the Beginning: This indeed is a prodigious Composition of Blasphemy and Folly; a strange Contumely to God, but fatal Treachery to ourselves: For, alas! Satan entertains us all this while but with a Trick of Legerdemain, and as Juglers make us believe we have cut the String, which yet presently after they shew us whole; so  
 he

he persuades us he has thus severed the Condition from the Promises, when, to our Grief, it will finally appear their Union was inviolable. It is not all our vain Confidence that can reverse the immutable divine Law ; we may, it is true, delude ourselves, keep up our Spirits high ; in a secure Jollity, *eat and drink, and rise up to play*, and so not only loiter, but revel out our Day, till the Night overtake us *wherein no man can work* ; but we shall never be able to propagate the Deceit, where only it could avail us, to persuade God to pay the Hire, to those that have been no Labourers, or give the Prize to any who have not run to obtain it. Let every Man, therefore, in a just Tenderneſs to his own Soul, ſtrictly examine his Hopes, try not how high they tower, but how deep they are founded, whether on the Sand or on the Rock, the flattering Deluſions of Satan, and the Dreams of his own Fancy, or on the Promiſes of God ; for though all pretend to build on the latter, yet, God knows, a Multitude of fooliſh Architects there are, which miſtake their Ground, take that for Assurance that is not ; and this truly is a Thing deſerves to be ſoberly conſidered, they that moſt greedily catch at the Promiſes, do often embrace a Cloud inſtead of the Deity which they ſo eagerly graſp, and thereby think to enjoy : But faithful Obedience, and not inſolent Hopes commend us unto God. The Goſpel indeed deſcribes to us great and inſtimable Felicities ; but he that can think this gives him a Title to them, may as well pretend to the whole World, becauſe he has the Map of it in his Houſe : For though it mentions them to all, yet it promiſes them to none but the obedient. And thoſe *Iſraelites* which fled from the Sight of *Goliath*, 1 Sam. xvii. 25. might as reaſonably challenge the Reward propoſed to the Victor, as Men can pretend to enter



into Life without keeping the Commandments ; this then is the one Criterion by which a Man may judge of his Hopes ; if they be but proportionable to his Obedience, they are then regular, and such as will not make him ashamed, but prove Incentives and Engagements to every good Work. Let him obey as much as he can, and then he need not deny himself the Comfort of hoping as much as he can too. But if his Hopes exceed this Measure, and square themselves only by his Wishes ; if he look for Heaven, not because he is qualified for it, but because he wants or covets it ; this is rather to dream than hope, and such Whimsies will as soon invest the Beggar in Wealth, the defamed in Honour, the Sick in Health, or any Man in any thing he has but a mind to, as compass Heaven for the bold Fiduciary.

5. It is indeed like those Lunacies wherein Mens Fancies adopt them  
*Folly to hope*      Heirs to those Kingdoms they know  
*for Heaven*      Heirs to those Kingdoms they know  
*while we be*      nothing more of, than the Names ;  
*unqualified*      and sure the Analogy holds as well in  
*for it.*              the Cure as the Disease : Let these

Patients a-while be kept dark, taken from the dazzling Contemplations of their imaginary Privileges, to the sad Reflexion on their Sins ; and as God expostulates with *Israel*, Ezek. xxxiii.

26. *Ye stand upon the sword, ye work abomination, and ye defile every man his neighbour's wife, and shall ye possess the land ?* So let them recite to themselves the Catalogues of their Impieties, and then ask their own Hearts, whether these be the Qualifications of those that shall rest in God's holy Hill ; whether these Marks of the Beast can ever rank them among the Followers of the Lamb ? And let these Considerations be pressed home, reiterated so often, till, by repeated Strokes, they have made good the other Part of the Method, made their Souls bleed, and by that  
that

that spiritual Phlebotomy, tempered their swelling Veins, allayed the Over-sanguineness of their Constitution; and then there remains but one thing more to compleat the Course, and that is bringing them into the Work-house, setting them really to *work out their salvation with fear and trembling*, which they had so near played away by Confidence and Presumption: And when they have done thus, they have verified their Hopes, and then may safely re-assume them: They are returned again with Advantage to their first Point, and are that in Sobriety and Reality, which they then were only in Fiction and Imagination.

6. And now would God Men would once be content to be thus disabused; *How to* that they would not be so in love with *judge of* Deceit, as in the Prophet's Phrase, *Jer. sound Do-* *viii. 5. to hold it fast:* That they would *ctrine.* not choose Chimeras and fantastick Images before real and substantial Felicities, and prefer that Hope which will be sure to shipwreck them, before that which will be *an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, Heb. vi. 19.* and if this so reasonable a Proposal may be embraced, if the World should, as the *Spaniard* said, but *rise wise one Morning*, what a deal of dead Merchandize would Satan have upon his Hands? Many of those they call the comfortable Doctrines would want Vent, which are now the staple Commodity of his Kingdom. What those are, it is no Part of my Design to examine, it will be every Man's particular Concern to do it for himself; which he may do by this one Test, whether they more animate Men to hope well than to live well? Whether they bring *Alexander's Sword* to cut asunder the *Gordian Knot*, to sever between the Promise and the Condition? or the Sword of the Spirit to subdue all to the Obedience of Christ?

If the former, we may expect the Fruits of such will be all that Licentiousness which St. Paul describes, as *the works of the flesh*, Gal. v. 19. it being not to be imagined, that the Precepts of the Gospel, which they divide from the Promises, only that they might fall off, shall then be voluntarily taken up in mere Good-nature and heroick Generosity; that those who are so industrious to avoid the Necessity of Christian Practice, will make it their Freewill Offering. If there should happen to be some few of so ingenuous a Gratitude, yet it is certain, that is not our common Mould; few Men will be better than they think their Interest bids them be, and therefore such Principles are dangerous Seminaries of Libertinism; and it is Mens very important Concernment not to admit them. Let not then their chearful Aspect recommend them to our Embraces; Men may be killed with too much Cordial; that which seems to refresh the Spirits, may inflame the Blood, and though cold Poisons have gotten the Fame of being the most malignant, yet there are hot that are as infallibly mortiferous. Let it be our Care, in Opposition to both, to keep ourselves in that moderate equal Temper, which belongs to healthy Souls: And since that is the vilest Heat which is gotten by Exercise, set to our Business, employ ourselves diligently in all those Duties the Gospel exacts, and then we shall not want such an Hope as may warm our Hearts, keep us in a chearful Expectation, till we come to the glorious Fruition of that *eternal salvation which God has promised to all them, and only them, that obey him*. And till we do thus, till we consider as well what we are to do, as what we are to receive, there will be no Hope of restoring Christianity to its native Vigour: We shall make it evaporate all its Strength in insignificant Hopes, convert it into Air,  
to

to bear up our Bubbles, instead of that firm Ground, whereon we should build Virtue here, and Glory hereafter.

C H A P. V.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from carnal Consideration.*

I. **A**FTER the Disadvantages of *Carnal Consideration*, may fairly be subjoined the Ills of that *Enemy to Advergency* which is impregnated by *Religion*: Sensuality and Sloth, and makes Presence unto Right-reason, but tends, indeed, as much as any thing to the frustrating the Design and enfeebling the Force of our Religion: Such close Reserves of Deceit and Malice have Men to their own Souls, that when they quit one strong Hold of Satan's, it is only to retreat to another. When they are not so brisk and aërial, as lightly to skip over those Precepts that lie in their Way, they are so gross and unwary as to fall at them; if they may not pass for Straws and Chaff, such as every Blast of vain Confidence may blow away, they shall then be improved into Heaps and Mountains, become Stones of Stumbling and Rocks of Offence; and when they are called upon to consider them, they do it in so perverse a Manner, as if they meant to revenge themselves on that unwelcome Importunity; their Consideration is worse than Neglect. They look into them insidiously, not as Disciples, but as Spies; not to weigh the Obligingness, but to quarrel the Unreasonableness or Difficulty of the Injunctions, not to direct their Practice, but excuse their Prevarications.



*Begets hard  
Thoughts of  
God's Com-  
mands.*

2. From this unsincere kind of Inspection it is, that the Precepts have got so formidable Appearance with many, that they have fallen under such heavy Prejudices, as to resolve them intolerable Yokes, insuperable Tasks ; that this *Canaan* is a Land that eats up its Inhabitants, wherein there is so little of Enjoyment, that it scarce affords a Being. Men count a Life under such Restraints, so joyless and uneasy, that it differs from Death only, by being more passive. They think Zeal, like a hestick Fever, in a slow, but certainly fatal Fire, exhausts and consumes the Spirits. Mortification and Self-denial macerate and decay the Body, and Liberality dissipates and wastes the Estate : And with these Apparitions, which themselves have conjured up, Men run frightened from Duty, resolve the Burden is insupportable, or at least grievous to be born, and therefore, as our Saviour says of the Pharisees, *will not touch it, no not so much as with one of their fingers, Matt. xxiii.*

4. never make any Attempt to try what indeed they are, but take their Measures from their own, or perhaps other Mens prejudicate Opinions, and thence take out an authentick Record and Patent for Sloth, fancy the Journey too long for them, and therefore sit still ; first call Christ's Commandments grievous, and then improve that Slander into a Manumission ; absolve themselves from obeying them : And, unless they may have the Gate to Life cut wider, made capacious enough to receive them with all their Lusts about them, will never essay to enter it.

*Inconveniencies of  
a wicked Life.*

3. But if the *prince of darkness* have enacted it a Law, that Difficulty shall pass for Excuse, yet if real Uneasiness may be admitted.

mitted to be as deterring as imaginary ones, his own Decree will retort the most ruinously on himself, and Men may plead it as their Discharge from all those base Drudgeries, those tyrannous Impositions wherewith he loads them. The Drunkard may experimentally tell him the Pain of an aching Head, of an overcharged Stomach, the Ruin of a wasted Estate, and claim a Dispensation from pursuing that uneasy and costly Sin. The Wanton may bring his macerated Body like the Levite's Concubine, *Judges* xix. and urge it as an Evidence how cruel a Master he serves; and from thence emancipate and free himself: And, indeed, every Sin carries in it so much of visible Toil, or secret Smart, as would, by Force of this Rule, supplant and undermine itself; and sure Satan would never have armed Men with so dangerous a Weapon, had he not discerned them so in-love with Slavery, as secures him it should never be used against them; for, if it should, nothing could give him a more mortal Wound, more irrecoverably shake his Kingdom. Nor would only that infernal Region feel the Force of that destructive Principle, it would make as strange Confusions in secular Regiments.

4. For if such Pleas as these may be admitted, they will easily cancel all human as well as divine Laws, and every Malefactor will transfer his Guilt on the Severity of the Legislator: The Thief may say it is too great a Difficulty for him to resist the Temptation of an apt Opportunity, a rich Prize; that his Fingers are too slippery even for himself, and he cannot restrain them; and then quarrel the Strictness of the Law, which has raised so high a Fence about Mens Properties, that he who climbs it must endanger his Neck. The Rebel may complain,

*Strictness of  
the Law  
made an Ex-  
cuse for Dis-  
obedience.*

complain, that the Bands of Allegiance are too strait, the Yoke sits too close, galls and frets his tender Flesh, exclaim loudly at the Tyranny of those that laid it on, and in that Outcry drown the Noise of his own Treason; and so every other Transgressor may accuse the Rule, as accessary to his Swervings, till at last the Laws be made the only Criminals.

*Ill Consequences of that Principle.*

5. I leave every Man to judge both of the Equity and Consequences of such Discouragements in Civil Matters, and shall only desire he will apply them to spiritual also, where certainly they are neither more just, nor less ruinous: And whilst such absurd Pretences as these pass current, no Wonder if Christianity languish and grow impotent, want Strength to impress itself on the Lives of its Professors: The most infallible Receipt can work no Cure on him, who, upon the Suspicion of its Bitterness, refuses to taste it. The most excellent Laws must lose their regulating Power, where the Execution of them is obstructed; and we may as reasonably look for the Efficacy of Christianity among those who never heard the Name, as among those who owning the Name, do yet disclaim its Precepts; and so all those interpretatively do, who by accusing them of too great Rigour, avert both themselves and others from their Obedience.

*Such Men ill Judges of Religion.*

6. That the Charge is scandalously unjust, will appear to any who shall allow themselves the just Means of Information; but, alas! the Way of Process Men take in this Affair is so inequitable, as certainly presages the Partiality of the Sentence: What Person ever was there so innocent, so excellent, who, if arraigned at the Tribunal

bunal of his mortal Enemy, could be acquitted? Christ himself shall be pronounced a Blasphemer, when a *Caiaphas* is to examine him: And no Wonder if his Precepts find proportionable Dealing; if they be decried as impossible, tyrannical, perhaps ridiculous too, where the scanning of them is referred to those, whose Interest it is to defame them. Men enthrone their Lusts, set them up in the Judgment-seat, and none can expect they shall pass such a Sentence, as shall include their own Condemnation: If they own the Commandment to be holy, just, and good, they must tacitely accuse themselves to be impure, unjust, and wicked, and, as such, to be consigned to Wrath and Judgment.

7. Here then we have the true Account how Christ's Commands, which are in themselves so far from grievous, have gotten so unkind a Reputation among us; this is so direct a Course for it, that we may cease our Wonder, though not our Grief, to see it; for we behold them stand to the Award of those with whom they have a professed Enmity: The Jail gives Sentence on the Bench; the Bar arraigns the Judgment-seat. Certainly, when that Law which is spiritual, is submitted to the Arbitriment of gross Carnality, the Law of Liberty is taxed and rated by those worst *bondmen, who are sold under sin*; it is impossible to find any fairer Treatment: That which comes on purpose to dethrone Sin, dispossess it of the Empire it has usurped, will certainly be entertained with the same Exclamation the Devils used to Christ, *Why art thou come to torment us?* But as if this general Antipathy were not enough to ascertain the Rejection of Christ's Command, as if the national Feud, as I may call it, between Heaven and Hell, were not thought irreconcilable enough, Men offer

*They beget  
Prejudices  
against it,*



fer yet harder Measure, call in the Aid of personal Quarrels, and when the Precepts come to be considered, refer each of them single to that particular Vice to which it has the directest Contrariety.

8. Thus when Christ's Command *and make a* of meekness and forgiveness, of loving wrong Appli- enemies, and turning the cheek, bearing- sation of its ing the cross, or self-denial, calls for Commands. Audience; they consult (as *Rehobo-*

*am* did with his young Hotspurs) with their Anger and Malice, their Rancour and Revenge, and they soon give their Verdict, that to be meek is to be servile, a Temper fit only for the Abject: That to forgive Enemies is a Principle of Cowardice, that would emasculate the World; to love them a Piece of Spaniel-like Fawning; but to turn the Cheek, not only to hazard, but invite new Injuries, by owning them as Benefits; paying Blessing for Curses, Kindness and Good-turns for Hatred, is such a ridiculous Patience, as must expose to the Insolence of many, and the Scorn and Derision of all Men; and then the Resolution is ready, they will be no such Fools for Christ's sake: So when the Precept of Humility and Lowliness comes to be considered, their Pride is deputed to hear its Plea, and then, though it bring the Authority of Christ's Example, as well as his Command, it will be judged invalid: Christ indeed *took upon him the form of a servant*, and to that, Humility was a proportionable Adjunct: But what is that to them whose aspiring Humour abhors Subjection, it is not calculated for their Meridian, they are of another Manner of Spirit, and would not have it embased by the Admission of so mean a Quality: And though Christ hath put *poverty of spirit* among his Beatitudes, they resolve he shall not ensnare them with that Artifice; they will not take his Measures of Felicity,

Felicity, or resign that Pleasure they have in valuing themselves, for any thing he proposes in exchange. In like manner, the Precepts of Temperance, Sobriety, and Chastity, are not permitted to the Judgment of sober Reason, nay, nor of mere natural Desire; but to Appetites vitiated and inflamed by radicated Habits; and then the Glutton thinks, to eat moderately is to be starved, and will as soon *put a knife, Prov. xxiii. to his throat*, in the vulgar Sense of cutting it, as in *Solomon's* Notion of restraining his Excess. Thus the Drunkard, with his false Thirsts, looks on Sobriety as a Kind of Hell, where he shall want *a drop to cool his tongue*, and thinks the abandoning his debauched Jollities is an implicit Adieu to all the Comforts of Life. The unclean Person, when his Blood is high, scoffs at Chastity as a religious kind of Impotence, and only so far considers the Precept of *pulling out the eye*, as to infer that it were as easy literally to part with it, as to restrain its lustful Range; not look at all, as not look to Lust: And proportionably it fares with Charity and Bounty, which though our Saviour recommend, *Mammon* arraigns of Robbery, and stigmatizes as a Thief that picks the Purse, and rifles Coffers. But amidst all these, *the taking up the cross, suffering for righteousness sake, and the doctrine of self-denial*, fall under the heaviest Prejudice. These are opposed not by some one single Vice, but the confederate Arms of all, even those whose Interests are flatly opposite, do here unite: *Herod and Pilate, Sadducees and Pharisees* accord against Christ, and all are freely suffered, nay invited, to exhibit their Complaints against these Mandates. Covetousness cries out, that this is the most ruinous Prodigality, casts away an Estate in a Lump, and lays all open to Forfeiture and Confiscation; and Prodigality takes it as ill to be forestalled, and have nothing left for  
it

it to dissipate. Profaneness avows a Contempt of it as a Folly, and most open Madness, to part with real Pleasure for an empty Name, or Profit for that bankrupt Thing called Conscience : And Hypocrisy has a more secret Hatred of it, as its Detector ; that which will bring it to a Test which it cannot pass. Malice puts in a Caveat, that this is to gratify Enemies, and lose the Satisfaction of Revenge : And Self-love puts in another, that it is to destroy one's self. In short, every Limb of the Body of Sin discharges a Blow at this innocent and divine Sanction ; as if they meant it should exemplify its own Doctrine, by assuming that passive Temper it recommends.

*Our Lusts  
make us  
improper  
Judges of  
our Duty :*

9. But alas, who can expect any more upright Verdicts from such pack-  
ed, such corrupt Juries, and why may  
not Christ be permitted to claim the  
common Benefit of our Laws, to make  
his Challenge and Exceptions against  
this so incompetent Impannel ? It is  
the Counsel of the Wise Man, not to advise in com-  
mon Affairs with those whose Tempers may be sup-  
posed to bias them, *Consult not, says he, with a  
coward in matters of war, nor with a slaggard, of  
much business, Eccles xxxvii. 11.* and sure if they  
be ill Counsellors, they must be worse Judges : But  
why then do we set Pride to judge of Humility,  
Lust of Purity, Covetousness of Liberality ; and  
make our Vices the Arbitrators of those Laws  
which should restrain them ? This is such a gross  
Injustice as common Humanity abhors ; we deal by  
other Measures with Men, the most notorious and  
flagitious Criminals, and reserve this Way of Pro-  
cess for those Things only wherein our God may be  
concerned. It is a severe Exprobration of a profane  
People, *Malachi i. 8.* where God accuses them for  
treating

treating him with less Reverence than they would do a mortal Prince. Offer it now to thy Prince : But alas ! we shall force him to descend far lower in his Expostulation, so far we are from paying him the Duty and Regard belonging to a Prince, that we yield him not the Rights of common Men ; force him to stand to those Measures which we think too inequitable to press upon a Murderer, a Thief, or Rebel at the Bar.

10. But this waving of common Rules is a plain Confession that we need more Indulgence, than those will allow : When Mens Lusts thus usurp the Tribunal, and judge in their own Cause, it is a palpable Discovery they dare not remit themselves to any more equal Determination. And, indeed, in this Point of their Interest, they pass a right Judgment ; for, it is certain, were the Case referred to any competent Judge, indeed to any but themselves, they would inevitably be cast ; and sure it is high Time that some should assist oppressed Virtue in its Appeal, find it out some Court of Equity where its Plea may be heard : And we need not travel far for that Purpose, every Man may do it in his own Breast, where, in his little Commonwealth he shall find a Court of God's erecting : Let him but draw the Cause thither, discuss the Matter in his own Conscience ; and he will soon find the former unrighteous Sentences reversed : Let him but seriously reflect on his Violations of those sacred Precepts of Christ ; and observe what a Sting and secret Remorse every such Breach leaves within him ; and that will be a competent Attestation of the Equity and Obligingness of those Mandates : For from whence else can the Regret arise ? Those Things that are either impossible in their Nature,

*But Conscience is more equal or impartial in her Judgment or Verdict.*



or unconcerning to us, cannot beget it. No Man accuses himself for not flying in the Air, or walking upon the Water, nor owns himself guilty in the Non-observance of any Laws, but such as have Power to oblige him: And therefore these close Pangs and Checks of Conscience are an irrefragable Evidence, that Men do inwardly assent to the Justice and Authority of those divine Rules which their Actions, yea often their Words too, do most oppugn.

11. But over and above the Throws and After-pains of Conscience, when Sin is brought forth, the Self-accusation of the Criminal, when none beside controuls, nay many flatter and commend; I say, beyond this secondary and reflex Apology for Christ's Law, owed to the foregoing Prevarication of it, there is an early and immediate Verdict passed in its Behalf, in the Esteem and Liking which those Documents command, wherever they pass; creating an Assent and Veneration not only when obeyed, but from professed Despisers, who cannot choose but think well of that Virtue they desert, and the Necessity of their Affairs compels them to speak ill of; an Event visible in the Condemnation of our Saviour, where the Judge, who gave Sentence against him, at the same Moment *washed his hands*, and openly professed, *he found no fault in him*.

12. And indeed this very Reflexion on the Author of these Precepts, if well considered, would supersede all other Arguments. The Mandates of the Gospel on this one Score, that they are Christ's, are certainly both pure in themselves, and possible to us; and so most worthy not only of all Obedience, but all Love too. He who is our Lord upon both the Titles of Creation and Redemption, may, certainly,

*The Precepts of Religion are possible to be performed.*

tainly, with all Justice, impose what Laws he pleases on us. Yet he, who laid down his Life for the Redemption of the Transgressions which were under the first Testament, cannot be imagined so inconsiderate of our Frailty, which himself had smarted for; as to introduce another of equal Rigour, or be so prodigal of his Blood, as to pour it out for those who, by a new Set of impossible Commands, should infallibly reforge themselves again: And if this cannot be supposed, the contrary may be concluded, that he hath so far condescended to our Imbecillity, as not to prescribe us any thing which he either finds or makes us not able to perform. It is true, indeed, his Laws are above the Reach of our corrupt and debased Nature; and they were unfit to be his, were they not so: But when he, by his Grace, offers to elevate and refine this Nature, bring it up to the Pitch and Purity of those Laws, this is a far greater Mercy than if he had descended to our Corruption; so he might have contaminated himself, given Laws unworthy of him: But alas! what Advantage would it be to us, to have the Blasphemy mentioned, *Psal. l.* so verified, to have our God, in this Sense, *such a one as ourselves?* But by this other Method he purifies, and exalts us; puts us in a Capacity of being *like unto him*, in which is summed up at once, all both Virtue and Felicity.

13. And on this glorious End, every particular Command of his has a direct Aspect, every one of them tending to re-impress on us some Part of that divine Image which was razed out by the first Sin; and this, one would think enough to recommend them to our highest Value. Certainly, if Conscience may be Judge, it will be so; there being, in this Case, no Middle between

*The End of Religion is to make us like God.*

devout Reverence and horrid Blasphemy; for he that despises such an Assimilation, must necessarily also despise him who is so resembled: He who thinks Meekness, Purity, Humility, &c. unamiable Qualities, can have little Esteem for him, in whom they are transcendently eminent, but will take the Prophet at his Word, and say, *There is no form nor comeliness in him, Isaiah liii.* But this sure can never be the Verdict of Conscience; he that can thus pronounce, must be supposed to have suppressed and silenced that. It being one of the most indelible Notions there, that all that is in God, is sublimely excellent. But because it is indeed too possible that Conscience may be put under such an undue Restraint, suffer the Violence of a Prisoner, when it should sustain the Place of a Judge; because many Men dare not permit their Consciences to speak, lest they should say more than they are willing to hear. And, lastly, since these Persons make their Appeal to Reason, pretend the Aids, and boast in the Advantages of that, it may not be amiss to bring the Cause unto the Bar, whose Empire and Authority none must disclaim that own the Stile, and least of all those Scepticks in Religion with whom we have to do, who will allow of no Conviction but from it.

14. And God, who, as the Apostle says, *leaves not himself without witness*, has so tempered and disposed his Precepts, as to qualify them to pass even this Test also, they being not the Contradictions but Improvements of natural Reason; and so most apt to recommend themselves to all that is Man, not Brute about us. Indeed they have the very same Aim and Design with that. It has ever been the grand Business of sober Reason first to discover, and then to attain that one supreme Good, which would give

give Rest and Felicity to the Soul : In this Inquisition have the Philosophers and greatest Masters of Reason, laid out their most serious Studies and deepest Contemplations ; and in their indefatigable Pursuits seem jointly to figh out *David's* Question, *Who will shew us any good ?* And now the Gospel comes a Solution of this so important a Query, *brings these glaul tidings of joy* to all People, and that not only in its *credenda*, by informing us what that Good is, but in its *agenda* too, by tracing us out the Way to it, beating us a Path which will certainly lead us to that *summum bonum* which our very Nature implicitly gasps after : And sure Reason can never jar with this, which comes thus as a happy Auxiliary to succour its Impotence ; as an infallible Guide to conduct its Steps, and as a glorious Light to give it a clear View of what it before blindly groped after. It is a certain Indication of Madness, to tear and mischief those Things that would be useful to us, to curse and revile a Friend, or fly in the Face of those whose Charity brings them to our Aid ; and therefore it is most evident that Reason must first cease to be Reason, and commence Frenzy, before it is possible it can set itself in defiance of those Laws of Christ, which are thus accommodated to its greatest Interests.

15. And as the Accord is thus observable in the ultimate, so is it in the intermediate Design also. Reason had by its Twilight discerned, that that sovereign Bliss it aimed at, would never be hit by an unsteady Hand ; by him who was perpetually tossed and agitated by his turbulent inordinate Appetites. Therefore young Men, yet in the Heat and Ferment of their Blood, were solemnly proscribed and banished from the Schools and Lectures of Philosophy ; therefore Lustrations

*and lay a  
Restraint on  
our Passions.*



and Catharticks of the Mind were sought for, and all Endeavour used to calm and regulate the Fury, if not extirpate (which some contended for) the very Being of the Passions; that so a Preparation might be made, first for the Knowledge, and then the Attainment of Felicity: Now the Gospel Precepts have visibly the same End and Purpose, every one of them expressly singling out some irregular Affection to combat and subdue; so that Right-reason and they are evidently of a Sect and Party, in so much that several of the ancientest Fathers of the Church attributed the excellent Documents of Heathen Philosophers to the Divine λόγος, the Reason and essential Word of God which after was incarnate upon Earth, and brought auxiliary Strengths of Grace to aid the Weaknesses of Nature. The blessed Jesus, whose bare Word checked the Sea in its highest Fury, and by that Miracle attested his Divinity, as much exerts himself in silencing the louder Tempests, and calming the intestine Storms within our Breasts: And certainly Reason will not quarrel to have been thus relieved; it being the Property only of proud Folly, to choose rather to lose a Victory, than owe it to the Aid of an Ally.

16. From this general View, it were easy to descend to observe the exact Concurrence of Particulars. God loves a *reasonable service*, and has so tempered his Commands, that every Act of Obedience we perform may be so qualified, and gain unto its Votaries the Elogium promised in the Law of Moses, Deut. iv. 9. *Surely this people is a wise and understanding people.* And, first, that the Command of Meekness is a most rational Precept, can never be doubted by any, who remember but the common Definition of Anger, that it is *furor brevis*, and sure it

it is very reasonable not to be mad; and he that has observed the unmanly Transportations of that wild Passion, how that the first Violence it offers is to the Man within him, will certainly think it the Interest, not only of his Religion, but common Prudence and Right-reason to suppress it. And the like is to be said of the more solemn Frenzy of deep Malice and deliberate Revenge, where the Fury wants the Alloy of being transient and short-lived, is embodied into Complexion and Temper, and grows inveterate into Nature. Anger indeed is a Fire, and he that touches it, though but lightly, will find it scorch him: But the Malicious lays himself as it were to roast at it; prolongs and spins out his own Torment, as if he meant to anticipate his Punishment in his very Crime, and commence his Hell here in unquenchable Fire. Truly no Sin does more represent that State of Horror to which it tends; it gives a Man not only a certain Title, but an ample Earnest; pays him Part in Hand of those dismal Wages. This was so well understood, even by the Heathens, that we see the Poets knew not how more emphatically to describe the future Torment of an envious and malicious Person, than by the Representation of his Sin. *Prometheus's* Vulture begins her Quarry in this Life; every malignant Thought, every spiteful Wish preys upon his Heart that harbours it; every revengeful Project puts him in the Pangs of Labour till it be brought forth, and when it is, it commonly rebounds so mischievously upon the Parent, that the Birth seems like that of *Agrippina*, when she bare *Nero* that murdered her. And surely not only Reason, but Common-sense will say this is a State to be detested, and consequently must give its Suffrage to those Laws of Meekness and Charity, which are the only Expedients to prevent it. Peace is deservedly reckoned

known among the highest Blessings of Communities, and sure it has a proportionable Value in every single Member of those greater Bodies, it being that which is indispensibly requisite to the enjoying of any other Good. A War, we know, interrupts at once all the Profit and Pleasures of a Nation; and this hostile Temper, in a Man's Mind, does the very same, and, like Choler in the Stomach, takes off all Gult of the most delightful Things, and so becomes a Hell in the *pæna damni*, as well as that of Sense: And then how absurd an Impatience is it, for Men to think every the slightest Injury from another insupportable, and yet heap such heavy Pressures upon themselves? Like froward Children, roar out for the least Touch from another Hand, yet knock and batter themselves without Complaint, as if their only Contention were, that they may be the sole Authors of their own Calamity; and that which adds yet more, if it be possible to add to so vast a Folly, is, that Revenge never repairs any Injury: If I have been reproached or defamed, it is not the wounding of my Enemy's Body that will heal my Fame; I may, by that Means, help to spread the Libel, by inviting many to enquire the Cause of our Quarrel: But that is no Medium to prove him a Slanderer, the World being too well acquainted with the Nature of Revenge to imagine it an Argument of his Innocency that acts it: So far it is from being such, that it gives a most violent Presumption of Guilt, according to that notable Observation of the Historian, *Convitia spreta exolefcunt, si irascere agnita videntur*. In like manner, suppose me hurt in my Body, Retaliation brings no Balm to my Sores: My Pains abate not by his having the like or greater; nor would my Wounds fester the less, though his should gangrene: So if I am indamaged in my Goods, I may contrive to repay him that ill Turn,

Turn, and yet not recover my own Loss ; and generally the spiteful Spoils that are made, are of that Nature. It is true, the Law may, in some Cases, repair the injured Person ; but then that is owing to the Justice of the Law, not to the Malice of the Plaintiff : For he that sues upon the naked Intuition of recovering his Right, without any Aspect of Revenge on the Invader, has as fully the Benefit of the Law (and indeed none can innocently have it otherwise) and then to what serves the vindictive Humour, what Increment or Advantage can the Superaddition of his Revenge bring him in ? It is sure, in all these Instances, it often does the quite contrary ; plunges him in farther Troubles and Dangers ; and when all this is considered, we may certainly pronounce Christ's Precept of Meekness partakes as well of the Serpent as the Dove, is as well prudent as innocent ; nor is this Conclusion at all shaken by that Objection which Men make from the Danger of inviting more Injuries and Affronts by this Tameness : For, first, suppose there were Truth in it, that Hazard could not balance the many certain Mischiefs which have been evinced inseparably to follow the contrary Temper ; and it were certainly less penal to endure Multitudes of light and transient Abuses, than those far more uneasy Ways of Redress, which Mens Revenges suggest to them : And then it will be perfectly reasonable, of these two Evils to choose the less. As for the greater and more important Violations, there are legal Ways which may prove Redress in some Cases, or Prevention in others : He that is slandered or impoverished, may take a Course to clear his Innocence, or recover his Goods : He that is hurt or maimed, though he is incapable of Reparations, yet the Law provides for his future Security, by awarding such Penalties as may discourage the Offender



sender from repeating the Violence: And to these Aids, a Man may resort with these Proviso's; first, that he abstract from all Design of Revenge; and, secondly, that the Matter be of Weight; and certainly he that, by these legal Means, cannot be secured, can be much less so by any private Attempt of his own: For he that despiseth the coercive Power of Laws, will much more contemn the Enmity of a single Person. The only Difficulty, in this Case, is, when a State is in such a Confusion, that there is no lawful Judicature to appeal to; but that implies so many sadder Miseries, than the want of such a Redress amounts to, that every Man may patiently enough cast this into the Heap of greater Evils, and not consider that one Pressure, when so much weightier Calamity exacts his Grief: But sure the Suspension of Law, in this Particular, does no more qualify a private Person to be his own Revenger, than it invests him in any other Part of Authority; and he may, with as good Right, place himself on the Bench, and become a Judge in other Mens Causes, as thus become both Judge and Executioner in his own.

*An Objection* 17. But, in the last Place, the Ground of this Objection seems weak and sandy; for that Meekness is not the way to expose a Man, generally speaking, to more Suffering: It is

possible, indeed, through the Barbarity of some few insulting Cowards, who love to vapour good cheap, that they may trample on those who give least Resistance; but this is not the common Bent of human Nature, (which ought to be the Measure in this Case) we find Men usually exasperated by Opposition, who are calmed and appeased by Gentleness. Anger is not of the Nature of that monstrous Fire the Historian tells us of, which *nothing but*  
*Blows*

*Blows could extinguish.* It is the Observation of the wisest of Men, that a *soft answer turneth away wrath*, and Mens Passions are like Bullets, which batter the walls that stand inflexible, but fall harmlessly into Wool or Feathers ; and I doubt not common Experience will attest it, that none do generally fall under fewer of these Storms, than they who are thus prepared to bear them. Let a meek and an angry Person cast up their Accounts together, and compare the Number of Affronts and Contumelies they have met with, and I believe the Odds will be as great, as between *Saul's* Thousands and *David's* Ten thousands. It is certain that the Return made to the first Injury provokes a new one, Men being so partial to themselves, that he who receives a Harm by way of Retaliation, never reflects on his own first Guilt, but looks on it as a naked Injury, and so pursues his Revenge, which has again the same Effect on the other, and so this Wild-fire runs round, till it have set all in a Flame, made the saddest Vastations, not only in Mens Minds, but their outward Concernments too, in the many fatal Outrages, which these eager Contentions occasion, all which would be avoided by a meek Disregard of the first Provocation : So that although some Injuries may fall upon the passive Man, yet infallibly there would be no Broils and Quarrels, which are alone the great Accumulators and Multipliers of Injuries ; which alone demonstrates how unjustly Meekness is charged with so much as an accidental Production of them, and vindicates that Precept of Christ which has fallen under so much, not only Cavil but Scorn ; it appearing, that to abstain from Revenge, and refer the Hazards of that to God's Providence (which is the Importance of his Command to *turn the cheek*) is the greatest even moral Security against Violence,  
and

and so approves our Lawgiver (in this so decried Particular) to be as well the *wonderful Counsellor*, as the *Prince of Peace*.

18. In the next Place, if we weigh *Secondly, of the Precept of Humility and Lowliness in the Balance of sober Discourse*, we shall certainly find it hold a just Weight. Indeed Pride is nothing but Deceit, a mere Cheat and Delusion, and so every Man can discern it in another, we there are able to trace the Windings of this Serpent, and say this Man thinks himself more wise, this more learned, a third more holy than he is ; yet alas ! in our own Breasts, we discern not the Abuse, suffer him to persuade us what he but promised to our first Parents, that we are *as gods*, something so super-excellent, that all must reverence and adore : And herein we take him at his word, never suspect these glorious Attributions may be no more than Compliment or Flattery, or what is no less obvious, Derision and Scorn. To a considering Man, it would be a shrewd Presumption against whatever Pride suggests, that it is attended always by Self-love, which is, as it were, the common Setter to all those Cheats which circumvent and fool us : But there want not also more convincing Proofs of its Deceit and Insincerity. Whenever we overween and believe well of ourselves, it is in Contemplation of some imaginary or else real Good ; somewhat a Man has not, or somewhat that he has : If we do it upon the former Account, that is undeniably a gross Delusion, a kind of *deceptio visus*, a filling the Eye with fantastick ærial Images, which have no solid Being ; and God knows such Phasms, such Apparitions, are most of those Excellencies which Men applaud in themselves ; Things conjured up by the Magick of a strong Imagination, and are only seen within that Circle in which

which the Enchanter stands : And though Satan be the grand Master of this black Art, yet his Pupils are now grown so dextrous, that he seldom needs to be called in ; our own Partialities and Fondnesses to ourselves, are abundantly sufficient for the Purpose. But if, in the second Place, we suppose the Things to be really extant in us, yet Pride runs us upon another Error, no less dangerous than the former, for it betrays us to mistake the true Owner of them, emboldens us to set our own Mark upon those rich Wares, in whose Acquest we have not been so much as Factors ; God is the one great Author and Proprietor of all that is or can be valuable in us ; to his Providence or his Grace we owe all the Accomplishment of our outward or inward Man, and though he allows us the Use and Benefit of them, yet the Glory is a special Royalty which (as the Gold or Silver Mines of a Nation) is reserved to his Crown, an incommunicable Piece of his Regality. And how woefully does our Pride befool us, when it brings us in such false Inventories of our Goods, makes us dream ourselves rich by another's Wealth ; like Children that call every thing theirs which looks splendidly, or the mad *Athenian* celebrated by *Horace* for his happy Frenzy, that resolved all the Ships and Wares his own that came into the City's Harbour ? But how more sadly does it betray us, when it thus puts us upon the Invasion of his Propriety, who is not, as the impotent Monarchs of the Earth, unable to assert his own Rights, but can certainly vindicate himself to our Confusion ; against whom no Rebellion can be any longer prosperous than he willingly permits it, and who has solemnly avowed *he will not give his glory to another* ? And when our Pride makes us thus both ridiculous and miserable, when it seduces us not only into the Folly of Children and Extrayagancies of



Lunaticks, but at once into the Guilt of bold, and Punishments of improsperous Rebels: Certainly Reason can never become its Advocate, or put in any Demur to that Sentence which excludes so treacherous a Guest out of Mens Hearts; which is the sole Aim of those Laws of Humility which Christ has given us.

*Thirdly, of  
Temperance  
and Chastity.*

19. Nor will the Precepts of Temperance and Purity find any worse Doom at this Bar, the contrary Vices being such Indignities and Contumelies unto human Nature, as can never find any Countenance from this supreme Part of it: It is the Prerogative of our Reason, that it discriminates us from, and elevates us above Beasts: For can it ever be brought to resign this so glorious a Privilege, assent to the Admission of those brutish Appetites which would over-run the Soul, level its superior with its inferior Faculties; confound the Distinction of rational and sensitive, and, in a word, render the Beast so ravenous as to eat up the Man. Yet thus it is in those sordid Sins of Intemperance and Uncleannefs, unless perhaps they are so much worse than bestial, that I wrong the Generality of the Brutes in the Comparison, it being only some few of them, the very Beasts of the Beasts that are guilty of any such Excesses; for generally their Appetites do not transgress the regular Ends of Nature, they know no such Disease as surfeiting, but eat to satisfy Hunger, and couple at such Seasons as best tend to preserve their Kind; and then it is to be considered how base, how degenerate a Descent it is for us to stoop, not only below our own Nature, but theirs; what a Solitude these Vices reduce us to, that not so much as the nobler Sort of Beasts will bear us Company? We must wander upon the Mountains to court a Goat, we must rake the Mire  
to

to find a Swine, before we can furnish ourselves with any Associates: And sure all this is so open an Hostility against Reason, that it can by no means be her Interest to abet it. Ask her whether she would be pressed to Death with Loads of Meat, whether she would be drowned in Floods of Drink, whether she would be suffocated with the noisome Vapours of Putrefaction and Rottenness, and the Answer she gives to these, tells you her Sense of Gluttony, Drunkenness and Uncleaness: Alas! she suffers from them the most barbarous Outrages, is invaded not only in her Authority, but her very Being, and therefore, even upon the so celebrated Principle of Self-preservation, must muster all her Forces to vindicate the Injury and defend herself; and then, certainly, Christ's Commands of Sobriety and Purity, must needs be entertained with all Alacrity and Gladness, as an Accession of Strength to her Party, an Aid to assist her in that just and necessary War.

20. And as Reason thus pronounces against the Sins of the Flesh, so, in the next place, does it certainly against those of the World. *Fourthly, of Liberty.* *Mammon* himself will not be able to bribe this Judge, but when Christ's Precept of Charity and Liberty comes before this Tribunal, it will infallibly be not only acquitted, but magnified and applauded, be called from the Bar to the Bench, commissioned, like the *Jews*, *Esther ix. To bear rule over them that hated them*; to dissipate at once the Wealth and the Covetousness of the Worldling; have the Keys put into its Hand, that it may have free Access to his Coffers; this, certainly, must be the Event of this Trial, for it is confessedly the Part of Reason to dispose every thing to those Uses which are most proper and advantageous, such as may bring in most real Benefit to the Owner. Now what other Employment of

Wealth is there (after competent Accommodations are provided) which can contribute to a Man's Felicity? If it be laid out like the rich Man's in the Gospel, in delicious Fare, or Purple and fine Linen, certainly, it makes not the least Approach towards it. First, for excessive Fare, if a Man be not excessive too in the Eating, what does he enjoy of it? Meat has no natural Propriety to the Eye, and can make no Impressions of Pleasure there; but if he be voracious and intemperate, it is then so far from making him happy, that it defects him into the forlorn Condition even now mentioned, sets him at Odds with his Reason, his very Manhood, nay, I may add, with his very Sense too, the Displacencies that he receives by the Consequences of his Excess far outweighing all that is grateful in it. This is well described by the Wise Man, *Ecclus xxxi. 19.*

21. As for the Gaiety of Apparel, *Vanity of* that can never, in sober judging, be  
*Pride in* thought any Advantage; it is that  
*Apparel.* which only Youth and Folly puts a Value upon, and as we out-grow the one, so do we the other; all that is convenient in Cloaths is as well, nay, better provided for without it; a rich Suit is only heavier, not warmer than a plain, and it is a kind of Prodigy to see how heavily Vanity, which is in itself so light, sits upon some Men, who are content even to make themselves Porters, so their Taylors may lay on the Burden: And thus, in many other Instances, the Fineness of Cloaths destroys the Ease, so that it often helps Men to Pain, but can never rid them of any; the Body may be languishing and infirm under the most splendid Cover: Herod's royal Apparel secures him not from being eaten with Worms; and Lazarus's Ulcers would have been never the less painful, though they had been wrapt in *Dives's* fine Linen.

22. Or if the Wealth be laid out on any other Part of that the World calls Greatness, as an honourable Retinue, Troops of Attendants, and the like, the Return will be no less empty; Multitudes of unprofitable Servants being a great Burden, but no Degree of Advantage. Alas! does my Meat relish ever the better, because my Table is surrounded with Waiters? Or when I go out, does my Train of Followers make the Air the more refreshing to me? Does not rather the Dust they raise make it less, annoy and stifle me? As for Matter of Business, the Number of Servants tends rather to hinder than advance it, daily Experience attesting, that in Crowds of Domesticks, every one of them thinks his Idleness will be hid; the Care of Doing, and the Guilt of Omitting, is transferred from one to another, and none has any farther Thought, than how he may quit himself either of the Burden or the Blame; so that, upon the final Account, all that accrues to a Master by the Greatness of his Family, is the Increase of his Care in the Regiment of it: A great deal of Vigilance and Circumspection being required to keep it in any tolerable Order; and if it be not so kept, his House becomes a Wilderness, and himself a Prey to the Beasts he feeds: The Licentiousness of the Servant redounding more Ways than one to the Damage of the Master.

*Of too great a Retinue or Number of Servants.*

23. If we should now proceed more minutely to every other single Expence which Vanity and Pride suggests, we should certainly find the like Success of our Inquest; nothing of real Felicity, but, on the contrary, the Vanity so interwoven and incorporate with vexation of spirit, that it is impossible to sever them; so that thus to

*Of Prodigality and Covetousness.*



employ one's Riches, is rather to suffer than enjoy them. But if we suppose a Man, on the other Side, such a Reverer of his Wealth, that he dares not employ it at all, unless it be at the Bank, for the bringing in of more ; that keeps it as Men do Beasts reserved for Breed, manumit them from all Work but that of Propagation ; such a Person is, surely, of all others, the farthest from receiving any Advantage by it : He converts it from a Servant into a Tyrant, and sad Experience shews us the Calamity of such a Transmutation. It has been always held the severest Treatment of Slaves and Malefactors, *damnare ad metalla*, to force them to dig in Mines ; now this is the covetous Man's Lot, from which he is never to expect a Release, as being his own remorseless and more than *Egyptian* Taskmaster : And the Parallel holds too, in the Gainlessness as well as Laboriousness of the Work ; those wretched Creatures, buried in Earth and Darkness, were never the richer for all the Ore they digged, no more is the insatiate Miser ; he has no Power to dispose of any of his Acquests, and though he calls them his, yet alas he possesses them no otherwise than a Prisoner does his Gaol, a Madman his Chains, they are only Instruments of his Thralldom, and the getting more, serves only to add more Weight to his Shackles ; and certainly Wealth can be no Way worse disposed than thus to buy so base a Servitude.

24. And now, since neither the *Charity best employs our Wealth.* luxurious Spending, nor the covetous Keeping, can advantage us one Step towards any thing that can be called happy, but do, on the contrary, engage us upon Toil and Misery ; Wealth seems to be a very oppressive Burden, such as we can neither cast off, nor safely bear ; and truly so it is till Charity comes in to our Aid, which, as the proper Element

ment of Wealth, renders that light which gravitates elsewhere, and, as the Elixir unto Metals, transforms them into Gold, stamps Purity and Price upon them; by freely giving, endows the Donor with whatever he bestows, enriches him, and what is more, enriches Wealth itself. Without this Art of using and disposing our Estates, we are those *Indians* who change their Gold for Glass; that silly Fisherman, who having found a Mass of Ambergrease, employed it to the liquoring of his Boots; are foolish to the Height of *Midas* in the Fable, who being promised to have whatever he would wish, made his Demand that every thing he touched might presently be Gold, and run the Hazard that he did, of being starved by our unhappy Affluence. Men say, indeed, that Gold, by Preparation, becomes a sovereign Cordial, but certainly it never does rejoice the Heart so much as when Charity is the Chymist; the poor Man's Hand is the best Limbeck to extract this Magistery and Tincture, the Flames of Love will really perform those Miracles they of the Furnace boast of; and would they employ themselves in this Laboratory, they would find the omnipotent Efficacy they dream of, sooner in this Way of dissipating, than in all their Arts, or rather Fancies of generating Gold. It is certainly a most generous and enlivening Pleasure which results from a seasonable Liberality: When I see a Man struggling with Want, his very Spirit as well as Body stooping under the Pressure, if I then relieve him, the human Nature within me, which is common to us both, does, by a kind of sympathetick Motion, exult and raise up itself, but if I have any Piety, that must do it much more; for as the former shewed me my own Image in my poor Brother, so this shews me God's: And how transcendent a Satisfaction must it be, to have thus rescued

scued him who bears so divine an Impress, to have paid some Part of Gratitude to my Creator for my own Being, by making myself, in my low Sphere, the Giver or Preserver of that Life, which he first breathed into another? This, and this only, is the Way to raise a Felicity out of Wealth; and, surely, since the attaining of Happiness is the one grand Pursuit of our Reason, that must even, before it has subjected itself to the Faith of Christ, give Assent to the Prudence of his Command, in this as well as the former Instances.

*Reasonable-  
ness of suf-  
fering for  
Righteous-  
ness sake.*

25. But there remains a Precept of our Saviour's allied to this, which seems by no means to comport and hold a Correspondence with the Dictates of right Reason, the *taking up the cross, and suffering for righteousness sake*, which contradicts the fun-

damental Law of Self-preservation, and the great End of Being, Felicity and Happiness. But this Suggestion, how specious soever it appears, is utterly fallacious; for it is no good Consequence, that because Reason aims at our being happy, therefore it forbids us all voluntary Sufferings, since that the Case may be so set, that such a Suffering may be the fairest Medium left us to our Happiness. It is a known Rule, that *of two Evils the least is to be chosen*; and the Election of the lesser Ill, though it be no absolute, yet is a comparative Good, and its Attainment, as far as the Necessity of our Affairs permits, is our Felicity; and Reason can provide no farther. Now this is the Estate of the present Instance: Two Evils are proposed, a natural and a moral; the natural, though in itself to be averted, yet much inferior to the moral, and then Reason soon resolves the Dilemma, that the natural is to

be

be chosen : All that can be questioned in this Affair is, Whether Reason define the moral Evil to be the greater ? But this can bear no long Dispute with any who consider but the Nature of Reason, which being seated in the upper Soul of a Man, is no way concerned in those Ills, which make their Impression on the sensitive Part : But moral Ills strike higher, invade the Mind, cloud the Reason, nay, often depose it from its Regiment, as is too frequently exemplified in the Force of vicious Habits ; and therefore, by how much our Reason is superior to our Sense, so much are those to be accounted the greatest Evils which assault that nobler Part of us. This certainly will now be the Determination of Reason, if she may be permitted the Freedom of her Vote : For thus was it formerly, where she bare the most Sway, and uncontrouled Rule ; the wisest and best considering of human, as well as divine, Authors having established it as an undoubted Aphorism, that Honesty is to be preferred before both gainful and pleasant : So that nothing renders a Man so deplorable, as that which violates his Integrity ; nay, they have generally gone higher, exhorted Men to become Volunteers in Virtue's Warfare, not to suspend their Sufferings, till they were forced out by the Competition of a Crime, but offer themselves free Oblations. Thus to suffer for one's Country, or one's Friend, was thought so worthy, so heroick a Thing, that noble and ingenuous Spirits were emulous of it : And it was so stated a Case, that *Epictetus* forbids a Man, on such an Occasion, to consult with the Oracle, whether he should do it or no, it being necessary to be done, whatever ill Success or Ruin be predicted, οτι ο δαυαλος ανηται-  
νεται, η ανρωπις μερος σωυατος, η φουνη, and how serious they were in these Persuasions, some of them have practically evidenced, as having suffered very considerable



considerable Pressures, nay Death itself, rather than they would bow to the predominant Vices of their Age, or omit the Occasion of eminent Virtue. *Aristides* would be just in spite of the Ostracism. *Regulus* observant of his Oath made to a faithless Enemy, though Death and Torment attended the Performance. *Lycurgus*, to perpetuate to his Citizens the Benefit of his good Laws, as subtilly designs perpetual Banishment unto himself, as others use to contrive for Honour and for Empire there. *Codrus* redeems the Safety of his Army with his own Death. *Curtius* makes himself a Martyr for his Country: And *Socrates*, in the stricter Sense, becomes one for his God; laid down his Life in Attestation of that most fundamental Truth, and leading Article of Faith, *πιστευω εις ενα Θεον*, the Belief of one God. And yet we find not that those Times, which were so ill as to shed his Blood, were so bad as to defame his Memory; he is not recorded either as Fool or Hypochondriack, nor have his Sufferings struck him out of the List of Philosophers: But he stands there the more conspicuously in those bloody Characters; and however the Credit of the Oracle may be otherwise disparaged, it never was on this Account, that it had declared *Socrates* to be the wisest of Men. And yet both he and the rest had either none, or very imperfect confused Apprehensions of a future Reward, when they engaged on present Suffering, and Death itself: So that we might be tempted to imagine, that some strange Change and Transmutation has now befallen Virtue, that it has put on so much a distant Appearance from its ancient Self, that the Accession of new Obligations, and higher Hopes, should absolve, avert, and utterly dispirit us; inso-much that what was Constancy in a Heathen should be Folly in a Christian. Certainly, this is a Metamorphosis of our own making, we look through de-  
forming

forming Optick-glasses, such as our Avarice or effeminate Sensualities convey into our Hands, which give not only strange and ghastly, but withal ridiculous Shapes; but, if we would consult our Reason, that would shew us Things in their proper Forms. Virtue and Reason are both the same they were so many hundred Years ago, and where the Object and the Faculty admit of no Mutation, it is impossible there should really be any such variable Appearance. If *Socrates* were so zealous for the one God, that he chose rather to relinquish his Life, than to consent to, or but connive at, the profane Rivalry of Polytheism, and yet be no Fool, certainly we may as securely transcribe his Copy: And though the particular Article may not be the same, yet if it be any thing wherein Virtue is concerned, the Cause is no less warrantable: He that suffers for a practical Point, is no more a Prodigal of his Pains, than he that lays them out on the highest speculative. The Commandments may have as good Martyrs as the Creed; for the same Authority has required our Obedience to the one, that exacts our Faith of the other. Nor is there any Necessity of Heathen or *Jewish* Tribunal, to convert our Sufferings to Martyrdom; we may receive that Crown from the Hands of those that own the same Faith with us. Those that say with the most seeming Vehemence, *Let the Lord be glorified*, may yet hate and cast out their Brethren for his Name's sake, *Isaiah* lxvi. 5. He that tells me I fear not God so much as he, may yet persecute me for honouring the King more; and my Blood poured out upon that Account, becomes an acceptable Sacrifice to him, who has commanded my Subjection to the higher Powers. He who calls Christ his Head, may yet rend and tear his Body; and if I love its Communion so well, as to take my Share in the Massacre,

I ap-

I approach toward that Dignity and Comfort St. Paul so glories in, of *filling up that which is behind, of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body's sake, which is the church, Col. i. 24.* He that multiplies the more indeliberate Oaths, may yet enjoin a solemn Perjury : And if I choose he should rather make Havock of my Goods than my Conscience, my Spoils become not more Monuments of his Rapine than my Piety ; they plead my Innocence before him who *will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain :* And how profanely soever my Wealth is disposed by him that seizes it, it is accounted to me as cast into the Treasury ; and so it is possible I may at once vie with the rich Men in the Greatness of the Oblation, and with the poor Widow too, in that higher Circumstance of its being all. In sum, the Opportunities of Martyrdom are not restrained to those Points wherein Christians differ from Jews or Heathens, but extend to all wherein we Christians differ from our Rule, the Commands of our blessed Master. If I suffer for my Constancy to any of them, I have certainly my Place in God's Martyrology, as well as if I had fallen under any of the ten Persecutions. God was not so partial to the primitive Christians as to allow them the Monopoly and Inclosure of that Dignity ; if they, as our elder Brethren, had a double Portion, yet there is still a Child's Part left for every one of us, enough to testify our Legitimation, and secure us from the Brand of Bastardy, *Heb. xii.* It was St. Paul's indefinite Affirmation, and all Times since have born Witness to the Truth of it, that *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.* Some unfashionable Virtues there have been in every Age, which have whetted, if not the Swords, yet the Tongues of Men : And those that happen not to fall under Abel's Persecution, must not hope to escape

escape that of *Isaac* : If they meet with no *Cain* to kill, they will undoubtedly with an *Ishmael* to mock them. But in what Dress soever our Sufferings appear, a good Cause divests them of their frightful Shape, pulls off the ugly Vizard, and shews us a Beauty that lay there concealed, and that not only to the Eye of our Faith but our Reason too. Fortitude was a Virtue before Christianity had a Name in the World ; and the very Instinct of our Nature whispers within us, the Baseness of being baffled out of a Truth or Virtue ; yet such a despicable Coward is every Man that wants this passive Valour, without which the active must find another Name ; Rage or Frenzy it may be, in some perhaps natural Courage, or Sanguineness of Temper in others, but true Valour is not, if it knows not as well to suffer as to do. That Mind is truly great, and only that which stands above the Power of all extrinsick Violence, which keeps itself a distinct Principality, independent upon the outward Man, so that it is not subjected to its Fate ; that can be free, when the Body is fast bound in Misery and Iron, sound and healthy, when that groans under Torture, and is never more strong and vital, than when that languishes and expires ; and this is so desirable, so transcendent a Privilege, as Reason cannot but aspire to : And this is it to which this excellent Precept of Christ advances us, when we thus *suffer for righteousness sake*, our Minds are all Light, what Darkness soever involve our exterior Part, and is, like *Goshen*, exempt and secure, when that falls under all the Plagues of *Egypt*.

26. And what Reason thus embraces for itself, it is not imaginable that it should reject, because it is richly clad ; that the Race should seem the more tedious, be-

*Rewards and  
Threatnings  
great Motives  
to Obedience.*



cause there is a Crown within View ; or that the glorious Rewards our Christianity proposes to our Constancy, should be esteemed as Menaces and Threats, Temptations to desert or turn Apostates. : No, certainly, Reason cannot dispute, and make an Inference so utterly illogical, but will rather use it as an Inforcement of its former Conclusion, establish it the more firm and immoveable by having the Basis thus enlarged, having Reward added to Virtue, and Happiness entailed on Duty. If in the Competition between two Evils, Reason pronounce the lesser eligible ; much more will she resolve, when the Contest is betwixt Good and Evil, the greatest Evil and the greatest Good, and choose that Excellence which, though superlative in itself, is more endeared and heightened by Comparison. If I violate my Reason, if I renounce Virtue, though bare and naked, then surely I do it yet more when she is thus accomplished and adorned, when beautified on purpose to allure the Eye and take the Heart. When, over and above the positive Donation of Happiness, she adds a Rescue and Release from Misery, and equally obliges by the distant Prospects of a Hell and Heaven. So that not only the Gospel Promises, but even Menaces and Threats become a Weapon in the Hand of Reason, when she stands upon her Guard, and fights for Virtue. If Sin present itself as my Protector from a temporal Calamity, Reason will tell me hence, that the Proffer is insidious, it exposes me to that which is infinitely worse than what it pretends to save me from ; and that not only in the former Respect of Guilt, but in that of Punishment also. What a Cheat is it to keep me out of the Dungeon, and send me to the bottomless Pit ; to save me from a temporary Fire, and thereby mark me out as Fuel for eternal Flames ; to take me out of their Hands who can kill the Body, to put

put me into his who can *destroy both soul and body in hell*? Reason tells me I am to abhor the Turpitude and Foulness of a Crime; and it tells me too, I am to dread the Misery and Smart of it also. It would not have me wallow in the Mire, though it were safe, much less when it is full of Asps and Vipers, which will infallibly sting me to Death. It cries out with *Joseph*, *How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* And it cries out with *Isaiah* too, *Who can dwell with everlasting fire?* In a word, by the domestick native Light of the *candle of the Lord* set up within our Breast, it shews the Uglinefs of Sin; and shews it too by the affrightful dismal Blaze of those unquenchable Flames it kindles: Thus, by the different Arguments of Terror and Endearment; of Love and Fear, of Interest and Duty, Reason asserts this scorned, decried, neglected Precept; take her as mere *Paynim* abstracting from the Expectation of Reward or Punishment; or take her as a Profelyte to Christ, contemplating his Promises and Threats, if there be Honesty, or if there be Religion, in either Instance the Soul must still conclude, that Affliction is to be chosen rather than Iniquity.

27. And if it be reasonable thus to *Reasonable- resist even unto blood striving against* *ness of Self-* *sin*, if Reason blow the Trumpet, *denial*, sound the Alarm to this solemn War, then surely it prescribes something of martial Discipline to prepare and dispose us for those Combats. No expert General will bring a Company of raw untrained Men into the Field, but will by little bloodless Skirmishes instruct them in the Manner of the Fight, teach them the ready Managery of their Weapons; and of this sort are all those voluntary Self-denials, and lighter Austerities which Christianity commends to us, which become necessary not

simply for themselves, but as instruments towards a higher End. The military Fame the *Romans* had in the World was atchieved by the exact Discipline of their Camps, enuring their Soldiers to Labour and Hardship. And, as *Tacitus* tells us, when a long Peace had slackened the Reins of Discipline, that active Humour, which was wont to be spent on the Enemy, recoiled, and flew in the Face of their Commanders, begat nothing but Mutinies and Disorders; and certainly it will be the same in our Christian Warfare, if we abandon ourselves to Ease and Sloth, never attempt to wrestle with a Difficulty, but keep ourselves in the Posture the *Israelites* Camp was in at *Moses's* Descent from the Mount, *eating and drinking, and rising up to play*; our Appetites will grow licentious and insolent, past our Controul and Guidance. If we treat them with such an Indulgence as is recorded of *David* to *Adonijah*, never say so much as, *Why hast thou done this?* It is not to be expected but they will rebel, though a *Solomon* sit in the Throne. For, alas, how is it imaginable, that he who never denied himself any the smallest or most trifling Pleasure he had a mind to, shall, on a sudden, deny all in the gross? He who has projected many, but never waved one Opportunity of shewing his Wit, how shall he find in his Heart to become a *fool for Christ*? He that has gratified his Palate with all that pretends to be gustful to it, how shall he descend to the *bread of affliction*? Or he that never tried to miss a Meal, how will he entertain the unwelcome Contrariety of not knowing where to get one? He who has never abated any thing of the utmost Pomp he could reach, how will he brook the Want of Necessaries, or, from his House cieled with Cedar, and painted with Vermilion, be content with his Saviour's Lot, *not to have where to lay his head*? In short, how shall

shall he who never could pare off any of the Excessencies, the mere Vanities and Gaieties of an Estate, part with it all, or lay down that *life for Christ's sake*, from which he never subtracted one smallest Pleasure? Suffering is a Thing to which the sensitive Part of us has an innate Aversion, and Aversions are not to be subdued at once, but by gentle and easy degrees; and Custom must have introduced a second Nature, before that original Part of our Temper will be supplanted. As it is therefore highly reasonable for every Man to aspire to the Dominion of himself, to keep his Affections within his own Power and Command; and though he have no Interest at all in the greater, enjoy a Sovereignty in the lesser World: So, in order to that, it is as reasonable to discipline and tame them by some voluntary Acts of Restraint, like *Hannibal*, sometimes to *pass by that Water to which his Thirsts do most importunately invite him*; to try by little Skirmishes what Strength and Skill he has, before he runs the fatal Hazard of a Battle; to deny himself in the lesser Instances, that so when the greater come, they may not have the Disadvantage of Uncouthness and perfect Strangeness to enhance their Difficulty. And this must certainly be acknowledged reasonable, or else we must condemn almost all the received Rules of human Transactions, which generally have this for their ground-work, that Men must pass through the first Principles and lowest Rudiments of any Art, before they can arrive at its Height. Men serve Apprenticeships to Trades, and think not themselves the first Day Masters of their Craft; we advance in Learning by leisurable and slow Steps, and skip not from the A B C to the Metaphysics: And certainly, the Skill of Christian Suffering is not the easiest of all Trades or Sciences, but will require some time of Initiation, many repeated Trials and Essays



to bring us into an Acquaintance with it ; to convince our Understandings and persuade our Wills, that *to lose our lives is to save them* ; and *to be faithful unto the death, is the best Way to gain a crown of life.*

28. If I should now proceed to *even- and all o-* ry other Precept of Christ; and examine it by the Rules of sober Discourse, we should infallibly find them so rational as befits the Laws of him who is the eternal Reason ; but having made these Essays in some of the most opposed Instances, I shall presume these may pass as the Representatives of all the rest ; and the Acquittal these have received at the Tribunal of Reason virtually involve them all.

29. And now, since both *Con-* science and Reason have pronounced the same of Christ's Laws, that *Pilate* did of his Person, that *they find in them no fault at all* ; methinks Judges should have the same Privilege that is allowed to private Men, that *in the mouth of two every word may be established* : But if any Man be so scrupulous as not to rest in the Sentence of less than a Triumvirate, let him, in God's Name, bring in a third, and when his vicious Apperites (which were before excepted to as Parties) are set aside, he cannot be distracted in his Choice, there being but one more that can possibly be called in, and that is Experience, which being a Judge that himself must create, he cannot fear it should be prejudiced against him ; so that he may entertain full Confidence of its Integrity : And no less may he do of its Ability, this being the most infallible of human Determinations, such as often corrects the Error of Speculation, and *shows us the Vanity of concluding what is practicable*

cable in Matter from being demonstrated in the Scheme or Diagram ; the Guidance of an illiterate Traveller in the Way that he has gone, being far more useful to a Stranger in his Journey, than the best Maps and most exact Descriptions of Geographers. But then it must be indeed Experience, and not only some slight and transient Essay. We call not him an experienced Physician that has had one Patient, or a Lawyer that has pleaded one Cause. Experience is the Daughter of Time, and is made up of many successive Trials, as a Habit is of multiplied Acts ; and to the Verdict of such an Experience Christ's Precepts will not fear to stand : Let a Man put himself into a settled Course of Obedience to them, abstain so long from all prohibited Commissions, as may wear out the rank Taste wherewith his Palate has been seasoned, and leave it free and disengaged, and then infallibly he will find such a Savour and Sweetness in those Virtues, that he will wonder how he came to be cheated into an Opinion of their being bitter and unfavoury, and will have no Appetite to return to his Onions and his Garlick, after he has thus been fed with Quails and Manna. That this will be the Event of this Experiment there is all Ground of Certainty, and when the Trial is once made, so irrefragable an Evidence will follow, that it will not leave a Man the Power to doubt ; only in the interim so much Belief is requisite, as may let him into the Demonstration, make him set to that Practice from whence he is to reap all this ; and if any Man be so much a Sceptick as not to have Faith enough to put him on the Adventure, I should at once, for his Conviction and Punishment, wish but that he might a while extend the same Distrust to Affairs of common Life : Let him doubt whether his Meat be savoury, and refuse to eat ; whether his Cloaths be warm, and so go naked ; whether his  
House

House be firm, and lie without Doors; and when he has a while thus smarted under his own Discipline, let him but apply the Wisdom he has thus bought to the present Instance, and it will unquestionably resolve his Scruple; or if he be still too impatient to attend the ripening of his own Experience, let him make use of other Mens. Let him appeal to any who has inured his Neck to Christ's Yoke, and ask him whether it be galling and pinching, or whether it be not easy, nay gracious. Let him ask one who, by repeated Restraints, hath subdued and tamed his natural Rage or Pride, how he likes the Change, and undoubtedly he will tell him, it is no less happy than a Calm is after the Noise and Danger of a violent Tempest, or the Ease of a broken Imposthume after the painful gathering and filling of it. Let him ask one who has divested himself of all his sensual Sins, whether by their Absence he now discern not their Necessity, and he will tell them, it is but the same the primitive Christians had of those Beasts Skins wherein their Persecutors had clad them, whose only Use was by deforming to fit them for devouring. Let him come to the converted Mammonist, and ask him, which he finds the better Treasury, his own Coffer, or the poor Man's Bowels, and he will be able to assure him he is become much richer by having less in Store. Let him come to the devout Ascetick, and ask him what Taste he finds in *Daniel's* unpleasant Bread, *Dan. x. 3.* and he will tell him infinitely more than ever he did in *Dives's* delicious Fare; that cloyed and surfeited the Flesh, this nourishes and supports the Spirit. Nay, finally, let him come to him that is actually suffering for righteousness sake, and he will exemplify to him the Beatitude which Christ has pronounced of such: Let him visit *Paul* and *Silas* in the Prison, and he shall hear them singing; *Peter* and

and the other Apostles, after their Stripes and Bearing, and he shall find them rejoicing; and *Stephen* amidst the Throng of his Murderers, and Tempest of their Stones, and he shall observe him overlooking them all, and entertaining himself with a more pleasant Prospect, seeing the *heavens opened*, and *Jesus standing at the right-hand of God*; and why should not other Mens Successes animate our Endeavours here? In temporal Affairs it seldom misses to do it. The Trophies of *Miltiades* at *Marathon* disturbed *Themistocles's* Sleeps, till he had raised unto himself and Country more glorious ones at *Salamine*; *Cæsar*, while he views *Alexander's* Image, upbraids his own Slackness with the Memory of his Conquests, and inspirits himself to great Attempts. He that returns with a rich Freight from a New-found-land, encourages others to trade thither also: Nay, even a Beggar speeds not well at an hospitable Door, but he is able to send Sholes upon the like Hopes; much less does he that has found a Treasure need to use his Oratory to invite Partakers; and why then should those few that have made this more precious Discovery be forced to monopolize it, as not being able to draw in Partners? Yet God knows, thus it is; those that hear of no Rarity but they long for it, as *David* after the Waters of *Beth-lehem*, can yet hear the same *David* cry out, *how sweet the Lord is!* and yet have no Curiosity to taste it; those whom the very Name of Liberty so captivates, that they sacrifice all that is really valuable, to that Chimera, can hear the Apostle speak of the *glorious liberty of the sons of God*, and yet, like hardened Galley-slaves, despise the Manumission. Those that hunt after Pleasures till the very Pursuit become an unsupportable Pain, can be told of those *rivers of pleasures* wherewith God offers to quench their Thirst, and yet inflict on themselves the



the rich man's torment, and deny so much as to dip the tip of their finger towards the cooling their own Flames. Good God! What strange Infatuation is this, that while there is so much of vicious Envy in the World, there should be nothing of virtuous Emulation? That Mens Heat and Vigour should all spend itself in childish Pursuits, and leave them thus cold and stupid to their great and serious Concernments? And what remains to him that ponders this epidemick Folly, but to breathe out *Moses's Wish*; *O that men were wise*; or if that be too hopeless a Vote, *O that Men were not so destructively foolish*; that their Rashness and Error might be confined to their lower Interests, and, as Fools are treated, *be kept from dealing in things of Consequence*; that they would not govern their Souls by such an absurd kind of Managery, as they will not trust with the meanest of their outward Concerns. And if this might be obtained, if this fatal Oscitancy which has benumbed and frozen them were but cast off, they would then, from the Report of the good Land, be animated to their Journey, and rather choose to make the concurrent Testimonies of others, Arguments to encourage them, than leave them as Hand-writings to appal, or Witnesses to condemn them. And he that shall thus borrow other Mens Experience with this Design of copying it out, and lays it as a Foundation for his own, thereby possesses himself of one of the greatest Advantages of the Communion of Saints; kindles himself at their Fire till he grows bright and hot at it; combines his Flame with theirs, and so increases the Ardours of them both; follows Example till himself grows exemplary, and, in one Act, receives and gives. But he that thus sets out, must remember, that it is more than the Journey of one Day he has to go; he must not think (as I said before) that every

every little superficial Attempt is that Experience which he is in quest of: He that thus fancies will be exposed to a very dangerous Deceit, for it is sure there is in all Habits such a Force, that they are not to be dispossessed but by a contrary Violence, and therefore he, that has been under the power of any vicious Custom, enters at first into a State of Hostility, has such a tough Opposition, as rather finds him Work than Pleasure; now, if he shall upon this first Essay pronounce, he is like to pass a very unjust Sentence: Let him fight on a while till he have got some Ground, and then, though the War afforded him little Pleasure, the Victory will yield him much. Every repeated Defeat he gives his Adversary will be a new Triumph to him, and what the *Romans* courted as so great a Dignity, he may every Day enjoy. But then, as he advances farther to the compleating of his Victories, so he does of his Pleasures too: When his irregular Appetites are so subdued, that they rarely make Insurrection, this is such a State of Tranquillity as gives him Leisure to discern, and enjoy the Delights of Christian Virtue, and will teach him to reproach the highest Panegyrick he ever heard of it, as flat and imperfect: So infinitely will he find it exceed the utmost Description, that he will say with the Queen of *Sheba*, *the one half was not told him*. This is the rich Prize which they shall obtain that run the Race, but it is not awarded to the first Step; and hence it is so many fail of it, that when they find the Uneasiness which attends the breaking off a Custom; this is such a Giant, a Son of *Anak*, as turns them back discouraged from the *Canaan* they went to view. But, alas, this discovers how small a Stock of Resolution they carried out with them; for where Men set out with Heart and Appetite, it is not such little Difficulties that will dismay them: If it be  
but

but their Sports they are engaged in, it serves to deceive the Sense of many Uneasinesses, nay often Dangers ; he that is but in Chace of a silly Hare is so keen upon it, that he feels not the Weariness of a whole Day's Motion, and if he meet with a Hedge in his Way, will rather leap it with Hazard, than be diverted from his Game ; but it is sure in their Sins they suffer far greater Hardships without Discouragement. The puny Drunkard is not disheartened by the first Qualm, but repeats his Excesses till he have overcome his Queasiness : The cast Litigant sits not down with one cross Verdict, but recommences his Suit, passes it through all Courts, and considers not his own Pains, so he may either weary or force the other out of his Right : The unclean Person falls not out with his Sin, how sadly soever it hath macerated him, but steps out of the Hot-house into the Stews. And shall Men be so indefatigable in their Pursuits of Infelicity, buy one Torment with another, and drive on the Year in a Circle of such woful Traffick, and shall Virtue and Pleasure be thought not worth the smallest Labour ? Can they keep themselves in a perpetual Contention with their Ease, their Reason and their God ; and can they not endure a short Combat with a sinful Custom ? which, if it have some Uneasiness, yet it is both infinitely short of what they have suffered in the contrary Compliance, and, besides, carries its Remedy in its Hand : For if the Difficulty arise only (as doubtless it does) from the Confirmedness of the Habit, every Act of Resistance, as it weakens the Habit, so it abates the Difficulty. It is therefore a most unreasonable Inference, from the Trouble of the first Opposition, to conclude the Impossibility of the future ; for, if the first were but troublesome and not impossible, the second will have yet less of the Trouble, and so be yet farther removed from

from Impossibility, and the third than the second, and so on till the Difficulty vanish and disappear. And if Men would but assume such a moderate Courage as but to keep the Field, and not to run away upon the first Gun-shot, they would soon find how impotent Assailants they had to deal with, who can never subdue any Man by Strength, who is not first emasculated by his own Fears. Let us therefore, to shun the Report of so dishonourable a Defeat, awake and rouse ourselves, put us in a Posture of Defence, and Satan, who is as cowardly as any thing in the World but we, *will*, as St. James assures us, *fly from us*. Let us upbraid ourselves with our unseasonable Hardiness and Resolution in our Impieties, till we have changed the Scene, grow impatient of those servile Druggeries, and ambitious of these honourable Adventures. And to animate us the more, let us fix our Eyes upon the glorious Prize of the Victory; and that not only the final and eternal in future Glory, but that intermediate which offers itself as the Earnest of that, the Calm and Pleasure of a conquering Piety. The *Roman* Story tells us, that the *Flavianists* had so possessed their Minds with the Spoils of *Vienna*, that they grew insensible of all Dangers in the Way to it, and even forced their General *Antonio* to put them upon those Hazards which his wiser Conduct would have declined. And why should not our more worthy Hopes excite as great an Earnestness? Why should not we have as great an Appetite to the pillaging of Satan's Camp, plundering that infernal Magazine of all its Engines, both of Mine and Battery, its Store of Arms and Ammunition, leaving him naked and defenceless, unable to make any Impression upon us? and this he certainly does, who by a steady Practice of Virtue, comes to discern the Contemptibleness of those Baits wherewith he allures us. He that seeks only the Praise



of God, looks upon the Applause of Men as a Blast of Air, which possibly may demolish and destroy a glorious Building, but cannot give Foundation or Materials to it; and therefore will not seek for, or solicit its unhappy Courtships. He who desires to be great only in the Kingdom of Heaven, laughs at the busy Aspirings of secular Greatness, and wonders at the Force of that Enchantment, which engages Men, with so extreme Toil, to climb a tottering Pinnacle, where the Standing is uneasy, and the Fall deadly. He that covets to be rich towards God, and has inured his Eyes to that divine Splendor which results from the Beauty of Holiness, is not dazzled with the glittering Shining of Gold, considers it as a Vein of the same Earth he treads on, and despises that absurd Partiality whereof the Prophet accuses Idolaters, to employ one Part to the meanest Uses, and fall down to the other. In a word, he that looks on the *eternal things that are not seen*, will through those Opticks exactly discern the Vanity and Inconsiderableness of all that is visible and temporary, and so will be equally unmoved with the Terrors or Allurements of the World, and neither frightened nor flattered out of his Duty. And he that is thus fortified, discourages and wearies out his Tempter, deprives him not only of Weapons, but of Heart too, and drives even Satan himself to Desperation; and when the Enemy is thus beat out of the Field, there remains nothing but to enjoy the Victory. When that Reluctance and Resistance of the corrupt Appetite is so weakened and subdued, that a Man acts with Freedom, he acts with Pleasure too. A Heart thus set at liberty, alaciously runs the ways of God's commandments: It faring with it as with a Patient that is prescribed Exercise for Health, who, at first, perhaps finds Lassitude and Trouble in it: But when the Obstructions are removed,

moved, and Nature disburdened of those noxious Humours that incumbered her, that which was at first his Task becomes his Recreation. For we are not to think, that it is any innate Harshness in Piety that renders the first Essays of it unpleasant; that is owing only to the Indisposedness of our own Hearts. We are, in the Prophet's Phrase, *bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke*; and if we be galled and fretted by it, it is because of our impatient Strivings, and irregular Motions under it, the Yoke is really no heavier than it is afterwards, when it is more tamely born; and yet the Ease is very different and unequal. And this teaches us a short Way to that Felicity we now speak of; to wit, that we compose ourselves to such a submissive and malleable Temper, that Christ may come only to govern us as Sheep, not to be put to tame us as Tigers. Let us withdraw all Supplies from our Lusts, and not by any secret reserved Affection give them clancular Aids to maintain their Rebellion, and then they will not be able long to make any vigorous Opposition, nor, consequently, much to disturb the Tranquillity of those who have thus resigned themselves to the Government of the *Prince of Peace*: And if this cannot be done in such an Instant, but that there will be some previous Displacencies, and uneasy Strugglings, yet even those, like the Scorpion, carry Antidote against their own Stings, when it is considered, that they are but the Pangs of the *new birth*, they will become very supportable by the Expectation of that Joy to which they tend. An enslaved People think themselves fairly advanced to Happiness, if they can get but to make head against their Oppressors, though they must expect many sore Conflicts and sharp Engagements before they become Victors; and, certainly, it is Matter of inestimable Joy to him, who has been under that sad spiritual Slavery,

to be set thus upon even Terms; with his Sword in his Hand, against those who once had him in such Vassalage, that he durst not lift up a Thought against them; but especially when it is remembered with what invincible Aids he is backed, such as will ascertain him of Victory if he do not treacherously defeat himself. And surely he must be of a strange phlegmatick Temper, whom all these Considerations will not enliven, convey into him so much Spirit as to make an Attempt, and engage him to do that upon so pressing, so great a Concern which mere Curiosity prompts Men daily to in common Affairs. And he that is not moulded of this cold and stubborn Clay, he that has not lost one of the Elements of Man's Composition, and has but a Spark of Fire in his Temper, will surely have some Warmth towards this so inviting an Experiment; and when he has once made it, I doubt not, it will then join with the Suffrages both of Reason and Conscience in Approbation of Christ's Laws, and will, with Solomon, pronounce of this spiritual Wisdom, *her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace,* Prov. iii. 17.

30. And now it must be a strange Contradiction, *Violence of Impiety, that must break this threefold Cord, that shall disannul the joint Sentence of all that are competent Judges in this Matter. This is not the Strength of Samson that brake Withs and Cords, but of the Legion that pulled in Pieces Fetters and Chains; and though too many Men make it their own Work, yet, certainly, it is only the Devil's Interest: He aspires to the Rule and Government of us, and to that End nothing can be more contributive than these Prejudices we take up against Christ's Conduct. A Soul, like a Nation, can neither bear two Legislators,*

Législators, nor be without one : And Satan having but that single Competitor, our quarrelling with Christ's Laws, is virtually an embracing of his. When we send Christ that rebellious Message, *Nolumus hunc regnare*, we say to the other, as the Trees to the Bramble, *Judges ix. 14. Come thou and reign over us.* And to this Defiance of the one, and Invitation of his Opposite, he very nearly approaches, that thus defames Christ's Commands as irrational or severe. The traducing of a Government being, we know, the immediate *prælude* to the casting it off, libelling the Forlorn-hope to Rebellion. But would God Men would soberly weigh whither such a mutinous Humour tends ; and when our outward Condition has given us so many pregnant and costly Proofs of its ruinous Effects, take Caution that it make not the like Wreck within us : That we do not madly exchange Christ's gentle Service, and glorious Rewards, for Satan's cruel Bondage, and crueller Wages ; the golden Chains of the one, which do more adorn than tie us, for the Iron, the Adamantine Link of the other, which bind us till they deliver us over to those *chains of darkness*, where our Captivity shall be irreversible. If this so reasonable, so necessary a Care may be admitted, it will certainly confute the profane Sophistry of our Age, silence our impious Cavils, and instead of providing us of the Colour of an austere Master to excuse our Sloth, will engage us to that Diligence that shall supersede the Use of such Shifts, and then we may hope to see Christianity have a Resurrection-day again, assume a Body somewhat of Solidity and Substance, which now wanders about like a Ghost or Spectre, a Shade or vanishing Apparition, which leaves no Footsteps behind it : And to the Re-union, O let us all emulously contribute, take up every one of us his dry Bones, and bring them to the



Prophet, or rather to Him who spake by that Prophet, to breathe upon them, till at last they be cemented and inspirited in active Duty, to shew forth the praises of that God who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light, 1 Pet. ii. 9.

## C H A P. VI.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from partial Obedience.*

*Partial  
Considera-  
tion dis-  
covered by*

1. **A** Nother sort of preposterous Considerers there are, by whom the Power and Force of Christianity is no less obstructed: And those are they that contrive not, how they may most comply with it, but how they may best bend it to comport with them; that rebate its Edge, or turn it only against such of their Corruptions as they have least Kindness for; that weigh the Precepts with no other Design but that of taking the lightest; those to which their Constitutions or other Circumstances carry least Repugnance; and come unto the Gospel not as to a Law, but to a Market; cheapen what they best like, and leave the rest for other Customers.

2. That thus it is with many, *partial and unequal Obedience,* needs no other Proof than the Variety visible in the Lives of several Professors. One Man behaves himself modestly, and tells you his Religion commands him Humility; yet, at the same time, transgresses the as strict Precept of Justice, and will defraud him he bows to. On the contrary, another is just, but insolent, and though his Sentence do not bend, expects his Clients should. That Man owns the Purity of his Religion in *visiting the fatherless*  
and

and widows, yet disclaims it again, by not keeping himself unspotted of the world. This Person is abstemious, but uncharitable, will drink no Wine, but thirsts for Blood. He prays much, yet curses more, whilst he is meek, but indevout. Now, while the Rule is one and the same, how should it come that Mens Practices should so vary, were it not for the unequal Application; did they take it entire, tho' there might be Difference in the Degrees, yet sure not in the Kinds of their Virtues; and as Men would not differ so from one another, so neither would they from themselves; there would be then no such thing as a charitable Drunkard, a devout Oppressor, a chaste Miser, Monsters engendered by this unnatural Commixture of Light with Darknes; but Piety would be uniform and extensive, and bring into captivity every thought unto the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. x. 5. And till it be thus, Christianity can never be thought to have atchieved any Part of its Design, which was not aimed against any one single Limb, but against the whole Body of Sin. Alas! it is not the lopping off one of the remote Members, that will render the remaining ones any whit the less vital; the having a Part less to animate, will rather serve to concenter the Spirits, and make them more active in the rest, as we see the pruning of Trees makes them more prolifick. And this Effect is very obvious among Men: He who has no general Dislike to Vice, if he repudiate one, it is common that he may cleave closer to another; and what he desalks from some dry, insipid Sin, is but to make up a Benjamin's Mels for some other more gustful. If the Wanton be sober, it is odds he thinks Excess a Rival to his Lusts; if the proud Man be liberal, it is because Covetousness is inglorious; such Unevennesses are caused not by an Unkindness to any Sin (unless possibly that Aversion which

which natural Constitution raises in some) but by a Partiality to one or more favourite Vices, for whose better Accommodation, and securer Reign, not only Virtue, but other Vices also, must give place.

3. And this, it is much to be feared, which is the *Sum of many Mens Religion*, ed, will, upon a true Account, be found to be the Sum of many Mens Piety, something they think they must pay to the Importunity of their Religion, which upbraids them so loudly, that they are willing to stop its Mouth, but yet would do it with as much Frugality and good Managery as may be, and so consider what it is they can best spare; what Refuse Sin which brings them in little of Satisfaction; and is, perhaps, in Competition with some other more agreeable; and this they can be content to devote to the Slaughter, *set* it to receive all the Impressions of the Sword of the Spirit, and so use it as a Buckler to their darling Lusts, to ward off those Blows which must else fall heavy on them; but, alas! this is not to obey, but to delude; to ransom a greater Sin with a less, and to transcribe, in this Matter, the Counsel of Caiaphas, to let one die for the people, that the whole nation perish not; to make one forlorn Guilt a Patriot to the rest, whilst, in the Tempest which threatened a general Shipwreck, the precious Wares are preserved, by throwing the less valuable overboard.

4. And, truly, that is commonly *and renders them secure and negligent in many Duties;* the Event; Men are so jolly and triumphant when they have worsted a trivial inconsiderable Sin, as if they had defeated the whole Army: This poor despicable Spoil is set up as their Trophy, and must, they think, witness

ness for them both to God and Man, that they are good Soldiers of Jesus Christ : They can, like *Saul*, with full Confidence meet the Prophet, and tell him they have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord, 2 Sam. xv. 13. though *Agag* and the best Cattle, the reigning and fattest Sins be spared ; and while they are thus secure, their Sins will certainly be so also, have no Disturbance or Disquiet from them, but lie at Ease and Rest, feed like Canibals upon their own Kind, be nourished by the Carcases of those unlucky Vices, on whom the exterminating Lot happened to fall, and by that Means grow to a prodigious Bulk and Corpulency : And, upon these Terms, Satan himself will allow us to mortify some Sins, nay, will himself cast the first Stone at them, and like a rooking Gamester, purposely lose these petty Stakes, that he may afterwards sweep the Board..

5. For if Men should give themselves up universally to all Sorts of Ill, if they should set themselves in a total Opposition to all the Documents of their Profession, he would lose one of his most useful Engines ; there could be no such thing as a false delusive Hope, they might possibly, by Obstinacy harden, or by Diversion gag Conscience, but they could not bribe and corrupt it, make it sit down well pleased and satisfied with itself. For when the Threats against Disobedience shall occur to the Mind of one, who has in all Instances disobeyed, it is impossible he should find any Salve, any way of evading the Thrusts they make so directly at him : But he who can alledge for himself that he obeys in some Things, confronts that to all Objections, and resolves he is not in the List of the Disobedient : One or two such comfortable Instances are as mighty, as God promised the  
*Israelites*



*Israelites* should be, *Deut. xxxii. 30. one able to chase a thousand, and two to put ten thousand to flight*; all Fears and misgiving Thoughts are dissipated and fled before them; and as once the *French King*, in his Return to the numerous swelling Titles of the *Spaniard*, thought the bare Repetition of *France, France, France*, was a full Balance to them all; so when whole Files of great and scandalous Crimes present themselves, one single Virtue is thought a sufficient Counterpoise. He whose Conscience upbraids him with all Profaneness towards God, and Insobriety towards himself; yet, if he can but answer, that he is just to his Neighbour, he thinks he has quit Scores, and fears no farther Reconings: He who is immersed in all the Filthiness both of Flesh and Spirit, has abandoned his Mind to Pride and Envy, his Body to Lust and Intemperance, and so sacrificed both those to Devils; yet if he cast but some Grains of his Estate upon the Altar, devote any small Part of that to God, for the Uses of Piety or Charity; he concludes that Incense will send up a Cloud thick enough to obscure the other from the Eyes of Divine Justice, and yield so sweet a Savour, as will perfume him in spite of all that Noisomeness; so extending old *Tobit's* Words beyond his Meaning, that *alms, though alone, delivereth from death; and cleanseth from all sin*. He who is deep in Sacrilege and Rebellion, that can daringly swallow repeated deliberate Perjuries; yet if he can get but the demure Tenderness, to fear a sudden Oath, he is Chymist enough to extract a Confidence out of that Fear, and presumes that formal Civility to God's Name, shall expiate all the real Violations and Contempts of him: And while Men make such Use of their partial piece-meal Obedience, it can never be the Devil's Interest to disturb them in it, to awake them out of their pleasant Dream,

or to exact of them to deposite those poor insignificant Remains of their Christianity, which serve only to make them more supine, not more safe.

6. Nay, indeed, his Affairs are so stated, that to some he can and does *The Devil's* and without Danger, allow a yet far *Policy is to* greater Indulgence; he can permit *ensnare a* them to bid much fairer than this for *Soul by a* Heaven, and yet knows the Purchase *single Lust,* is far from being made; he can see them cashier not some one single Sin, but whole Troops together, and yet not fear the sinking of his Cause: He can trust them so far, that as the young Man in the Gospel, they may be pronounced, *not far from the kingdom of God*; yet, as long as there is but one unmortified Lust, that can send them away sad from Christ, his Tenure is firm enough. Herod may hear John Baptist gladly, nay, do many things upon it, yet let him but keep *Herodias*, and she will soon be able to secure both herself and Satan against the Danger of that Competition. This is indeed his main Advantage, that he can hold fast by the smallest Thread; and whereas, to our Bliss a Conspiracy and Union of all Virtues is required, our Ruin can spring from any one solitary Crime: Many Rounds make that Ladder wherewith we must scale Heaven: Whereas one Step serves to precipitate us into the Abyss, so sadly verifying the poetical Axiom *facilis descensus averni*. In sum, while there is but any one single Sin indulged to, that is the Devil's Teather; and though it should be imagined so loose, as to give Men Scope to range over all other sorts of Virtues, to taste the sweet and feed liberally on them; yet still the Beast is in the Power of him who has fixed the Line, not only to be finally led away to Slaughter, but also to have the Length shortened, and be either put out of the Reach, or quite

quite removed from the View of those pleasant Pastures.

7. For though the Security raised whereby he is easily tempted to more and greater Sins; by such an ununiform Piety is in many so exactly apportioned to Satan's Interest, that he has no Cause to wish the Change of his Tenure; yet where the Circumstances are such, as will make it useful, he can easily twist his Thread into a Cable. When he thinks one Monarch Lust too mild a Regiment, he can set up an *Athenian* Tyranny, or which is yet worse, let in the whole Populacy of Sin upon the Soul, which, like the *Ægyptian* Locusts shall over-run and devour it, not leave any green thing on the ground; and that this is in his Power we have too much Reason to conclude. He is, we know, a cunning Sophister, and if he has abused us so far as to impose one Sin upon us, he may thence very regularly deduce many more; as one false Premise admitted, may be improved into thousands of false Conclusions. Indeed, supposing a Man resolute to adhere to one Sin, he may, with very good Logick, persuade him to Multitudes of others. There are but two Objections usually made to any Temptation; either the Offence or the Danger; and these are usually objectable to one Sin as well as to another: So that this Dilemma readily offers itself; either it is reasonable to buy a Pleasure at that Price, or it is not; if it be, then contrive that the Crime be pleasant, and that brings its Dispensation with it; if it be not, then why dost thou live in this one Sin, in despite of both Guilt and Punishment? The latter Part of the Dilemma it is no Part of Satan's Business to press; but the former he has too much Advantage of pursuing successfully; if he can but dress up a temptation to look invitingly, the Business is done. So  
ridiculous

ridiculous a thing is an uneven Piety, that it even laughs itself out of Countenance, and wants only Temptation to become uniform Vice. How absurdly looks it, to see a Man run away with *Joseph* from the Embraces of his Mistress, and yet with full as great a Speed accompany *Gehazi* in the Pursuit of a Bribe; and how obvious is it to conclude, that the former Assault was improsperous only, because not managed with the right Weapon; that he might have been hired that would not be wooed? What a Mockery is it for a Man to be zealous for God, and rebellious against his King? as in the Reverse, for a Man to be true to his King, and a Rebel to his God? And who can but think, that had either of the averted Crimes been cooked to their Palates, they might have changed Messes? Indeed it is not imaginable by what Rules of Discourse, he that embraces one Sin should reject another: If it be done only upon Fancy and Humour, as the repulsed Vice will have Reason to complain of great Partiality, when as bad as itself is received and cherished, so it points out a Way to attack him more prosperously: Let it shape itself to the Fancy; and sure Satan, who can transform himself to an Angel of Light, can soon work that easy Change: Let the younger Brother get on the Cloaths of the favourite *Esau*, transform itself into the Shape and Interest of the darling Sin, and it need not doubt of a free Admission. But all this while, to pretend Conscience for such an Abstinence, is of all other Pleas the most absurd; for why should he scruple at one, that abandons himself to another? As *St. James* argues concerning the Guilt, so may we for the Act of Sin: He that said, *Do not commit adultery*, said also, *Do not kill*; and it is abusive Mockery, the Soldiers *Ave Rex*, to bow to his Authority in the one, and resist it in the other. Thus unhappy is the Case of



him who entertains one Sin, his Inclosure is broken down, and he is a Common for all ; he is left destitute of a Reply to any Temptation, and like a bashful Person, will be in Danger of yielding, because he is ashamed to deny : And this, I doubt not, many have found experimentally true ; some Sins have been committed not so much upon the Force of Inclination, as to be consentaneous to themselves, to silence the Upbraidings of their Understandings for acting so unevenly, it being impossible to give a reasonable Account, why this, and not that, or that ; for when by one bold wilful Sin a Man is entered into a State of Hostility with God, it is not a Tenderness in all others will make up the Breach : And then they think the Rule of known Enemies takes place, where all Civilities are disclaimed and the Quarrel managed to the most Advantage. The resolved Adulterer could, perhaps, without much Difficulty, be just ; but, when he considers that that one *Helena* of his will certainly make a War, he thinks it is an impertinent Niceness to lose a good Prize, or dismiss his Covetousness while he resolves to retain his Lust. The incorrigible Drunkard could perchance easily enough be chaste, but when he remembers, that Drunkenness excludes him from the Kingdom of Heaven, having made that Sale of his eternal Inheritance, he thinks it is but good Husbandry to get as much as he can for it : So treacherous a Guest is any one Sin admitted, and lodged in the Heart, it despoils it of all its Armour of Defence, leaves it nothing wherewith to guard itself against any Assailant ; and be it never so small a one, it is like those little Thieves, which being put in at the Window, set the Doors open to all the rest.

8. But perhaps this Danger may be thought, in some Degree, warded by the natural Temper and Constitution of Men, which necessarily renders them unapt to contradictory Vices, and so will secure them, at least, from so many as are disagreeable to their Temper: But if this should be granted, yet it confessedly leaves them open to all others, and that were certainly bad enough: He that is as wicked as his Complexion cannot only incline, but permit him to be, will not want much of the utmost Number of Sins: But whatever we can suppose that to strike off from the Tale, yet, in the second place, it is very much to be feared, that will default nothing of the Weight; he that sins to the Height of his Appetite, perhaps Power, shall he be ever the more innocent, because there were some nauseated Sins, which he had not Self-denial enough to commit? God absolves us in proportion to the Rectitude of our Wills, not the Niceness of our Complexions; He that wills to pursue whatever he can find gustful, how impious soever; shall it be Virtue in him that some Sins are unfavoury and disagreeing to his Palate? If it should, there may so many extrinseck things be, by Analogy, brought in, either to swell or abate the Accounts of our Sin, that we shall be much to seek in the Estimate of it.

*except such as his natural Complexion is averse to,*

9. But, in the third place, even these very Aversions are no infallible Preservative; for if they happen to be more moderate and remiss than the Love of some other Sin, that predominant Inclination will subdue those Dislikes, whenever its Interest is to be served by those otherwise not gustful Commissions. There is nothing more ordi-

*which the Habit of other Sins will in Time conquer and overcome,*

nary than to see one Appetite pursued to the Violation of another. A Man perhaps hates Drunkenness, not only as a bestial but uneasy Vice; yet if his Love to Gain exceed his Dislike to that, when that is requisite to make up the Price of a good Bargain, that Aversion must stoop, and give way. A Man despises Swearing as an insipid impertinent Sin, yet if he set any great Value upon being in the Mode, and complying with the genteel Dialect, that will soon debase him to what he so much contemned: And truly there is scarce any other Account to be given of that great and foolish Sin. But in no other Instance is this so notoriously visible, as in that of Duelling. I need not single out any one Man's particular Inclination; the Nature of Mankind doth certainly avert both killing and being killed, yet when that Phantasm, that Chimæra, Honour, has once possessed the Mind, no Reluctance of Humanity is able to make head against it; but it commands as uncontrouledly as the Centurion in the Gospel, *says to this man, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh*; nay, as tyrannically as the great Cham of Tartary, who, as an Essay of his Sovereignty, commands whole Troops to ride down Precipices; nay, these Aversions are not only thus violently subdued by some foreign Lust, but are many times destroyed even by Force of that very vicious Principle which gave them Birth; for we mistake if we think they are always virtuous, or so much as innocently founded; Vice is often at civil Wars with itself; and the vehement Inclination to one engenders a Displacency to another; but yet such a Riddle is this Mystery of Iniquity, that upon the very same Basis is built both the Abhorrence and Commission of the same Sin. For Example, a proud Man as much hates to fawn and flatter others, as he loves to be flattered himself; yet let his Pride

but

but once work the other Way, and set him upon an ambitious Project, then all the mean Condescensions imaginable are with Ease digested, he can crouch and prostrate, and as the Psalmist speaks, *fall down and humble himself*, that by that Descent he may rebound to the Height he aims at : But still Pride is the common Cause of these so distant Effects. In like manner, the riotous Prodigal detests Covetousness, looks upon it as so sordid and base, that he brands even prudent Frugality as approaching too near it ; yet let him but once find the Springs to grow dry which should feed his Luxury ; when he feels his Riot begins to exhaust and prey upon itself, then even that despised Covetousness shall be called in to its Aid, to dig Metal for the Furnace to melt, and so by a strange Antiperistasis, Prodigality shall beget Rapine. Thus unhappily prolifick is every Sin, that it carries in its Bowels the Seed and Principle even of those that seem the most heterogeneous ; and how then shall a Man that has admitted but any one such teeming Lust be secured, that it shall not thus propagate, till his Soul become a mere Desert, filled with all sorts of wild and noxious Creatures.

10. There is but one Hope imaginable to interpose, and that is, that God's Grace shall prevent this exorbitant Growth of Impiety in him, and I acknowledge that is sufficient to do it, where it may have its kindly Operation ; but where it has so, it will uniformly suppress all Sin, and therefore, where any one continues in Force and Vigour, it is manifest that Operation of Grace is obstructed, and such a Man I should desire soberly to consider what Assurance he has, that he who has so evacuated God's Grace in one

*except restrained by the Grace of God, which such Men have no Reason to expect.*

K 3

Instance,



Instance, shall not do so in another? If in spite of that Grace he can be lustful, why shall he not be as able to resist it in favour of Drunkenness, Sacrilege, Rebellion, or any other Crime to which he shall at any time have Appetite? Can he imagine that God sends forth an irresistible Strength against some Sins, whilst in others he permits Men a Power of repelling his Grace? that were to transcribe the *Syrian's* absurd Fancy, that he is *God of the hills and not of the valleys*: No; certainly, he who has his own unhappy Experience to attest the Possibility of frustrating the divine Succours in one Particular, has too sure Grounds to infer the like in others. Nay, alas, it does not only infer it by way of Argument and Deduction, but it is very apt to produce it by way of Cause and Efficiency: We gain a Readiness to any thing by Custom and Assuefaction, and he who has habitually opposed Grace in the Defence of a Lust, has delivered himself from that Modesty which makes the first Defiance uneasy, and so runs on with Ease and Boldness to future Resistance. It fares with Men in this Violation of God's Grace, as it does in that of his Patrimony, the first Sacrilege is looked on with some Horror, and Men are fain to devise Arguments and Colours to delude their reluctant Consciences; but when they have once made the Breach, their Scrupulosity soon retires; one Draught of that impious Gain has such a stupifying Effect, that they can, without Check, swallow on, till the Sin flame so fiercely, that nothing but mere Want of Matter can extinguish it. But admit it were possible for a Man to be secured of his own Compliance with some Part of restraining Grace whilst he impugns it in others; yet who shall ascertain him of that Grace? It being God's, implies it is not in our Power, he may surely do what he will with his own, and though his Promise has made a sure Entail of it to all those, who humbly seek and diligently use it; yet it no  
where

where engages that it shall be the Portion of any other ; much less that it shall importunately and endlessly renew its Assaults on those who have often repulsed and put it to Flight : In that Case, God's Resolution concerning the old World, becomes applicable, *My spirit shall not always strive with man*; and Christ, who forbids us to *cast our pearls before swine*, will certainly never prostitute what is infinitely more precious, his Grace, to those who have so long trampled it under their Feet ; and so those must be concluded to have done, who have persevered in any one Sin ; for Grace is uniformly opposite to all, and therefore, the Cleaving to any is Defiance and Affront to it. But we need not the Help of Inferences and Deduction, the Threats of God are express in this Matter : The Talent is decreed to be taken from the unprofitable Servant, who has not employed it to the proper Use, and such infallibly is every Man who has not actuated the Grace given him to the subduing of every reigning Sin ; and the reprobate Mind, mentioned in Scripture as the most dismal of all Plagues, the *υς αδοξίμης*, which yields not to the melting and the purging Force of Fire, and therefore does consign to that of Hell, is founded upon the voluntary Rejection of God in particular Instances, *Rom. i.* How then can he, that in any one single thing so rejects him, assure himself that shall not be the Event of it ? That he who would not have Christ rule entirely in his Heart, shall at once be put out of his Government and Protection ? have all those spiritual Aids withdrawn, which should either assist him to Good, or fortify him against Ill ; and like an out-lawed Person, be exposed to the Outrage of all that will assault him.

II. And now would God this might be sadly pondered, that Men

*The Devil is content we should be partially good,*

would

would not be their own Sirens, and entertain themselves with those deceitful Melodies, which will end in *howlings and gnashings of teeth*; that they would not think their having some few Virtues, and but some few Vices will serve to satisfy the Design, or procure them the Rewards of their Christianity: For if they should continue in this Posture, and not be tempted to grow worse, they may certainly conclude, it is because Satan finds they need not. And can they be proud of that Virtue which the Devil himself will allow them? and think themselves good enough when they are as bad as he wishes them? But even in this they have no other Tenure than his Will. When he pleases, for his Interest, or even for his Divertisement and Recreation, he may hurry them to all that is most enormous; convert their Hypocrisy to Profaneness, their partial Piety to universal Ungodliness; they have nothing to interpose in their own Defence, not so much as a reasonable Argument to oppose to him, they have made a voluntary Sale of themselves for one or more beloved Sin, and now, as his Vassals, he may impose on them what others he pleases; and by their dotting Affection to their *Rachel*, take Advantage also to obtrude the despised *Leah* upon them. And how wretched, how deplorable is this State? What a Piety is this that we must owe to the Devil, while we can be no better than he will let us?

12. Yet this is without Hyberbole, *so he can* the Condition of every Man that is not *but ensnare* sincerely uniformly Christian; every indulged Sin gives Satan Livery and Seisin *us by any* of his Heart, and a Power to dispose of *one Lust.* it as he pleases. I know Men are apt to flatter themselves with other Hopes, and think that those Obediences they pay to God, shall, like a pre-engagement disannul all after Contracts made by Guilt,

Guilt, and put them into the Possession of him who is able to bind that strong Man. But God will not be accessary to such a Fraud, even towards the Devil; while they keep the Price, enjoy that Pleasure or Profit wherewith he bought them, God will never interpose to defeat him of his Purchase.

13. And as God will not thus forcibly wrest them out of his Hands, *God will not* much less will he descend to a Capitulation and Composition with him. *share our* *Obedience* *is a jealous God,* and what jealous *with the* Husband did ever, by Compact, divide *Devil.* his Right with the Adulterer? Where he finds a persevering Disloyalty he gives a Bill of Divorce and disclaims his Relation. Yet so besotted are Men, as to hope God will ratify that Alienation they have made of one Part of their Heart, and contentedly enjoy the rest, and as Competitors use sometimes to do, share with his Rival. But alas! that immortal Quarrel will not be thus taken up, the Difference between these irreconcilable Antagonists will not be so compromised. God disdains such a Treaty, nor will ever come so much as to an Interview with his Enemy, within the Lists and Recesses of one Heart. And while Men labour such an Accord, they are but combining with Satan against God and their own Souls: He knows well, that while he holds any Part, God will have none, and so the whole falls to him, and then he may very safely be modest, and demand but moderately, and by that seeming Deference and Yielding, gain more than by all his most eager Contendings. I suppose every Man will disown the having this ridiculous Design of compounding the Strife between Heaven and Hell; but, certainly, it is the natural Interpretation of such partial Obediences; when two Litigants contend for something which I have in my  
Keeping,



Keeping, if I divide it between them, is it not obvious to conclude I desire to compose the Dispute and satisfy both Parties, and is not this the very Case here? It is true, indeed, it carries a very absurd Sound, but then how more absurd is it for Men to act at such a Rate, that when it is represented to them in the truest Colours, themselves are ashamed to own what they have done? And this calls loudly upon them, to put themselves out of the Lash of their own Discipline; to recover such an Innocence that they may not be forced, with *David*, to sentence themselves, when that their Crimes appear in the light Disguise of a Parable.

*We must renounce all Sin, to avoid the Devil's Snares;* 14. And this, indeed, is the only proper Use of all these Considerations, the Danger and Folly are as unuseful as unpleasant Speculations, unless it be in order to the reforming that wherein both are founded. Let them consider themselves, as engaged in those wild Projects which even themselves look on with Scorn; as insnared in that unhappy Contract which has rendered them Part of the Devil's Possession, and contrive how they may obliterate that Reproach, and disentangle their mortgaged Souls.

15. And for this there is but one Way imaginable, and that is by quitting their Hands of that which they took as the valuable Consideration in that mad Bargain; restoring Satan's Coin to him; not only Principal but Use also; casting away the main Sin and all the little Appendages, which like Off-sets have shot out from that Root, retaining nothing that has his Mark and Impress upon it, that so he may not pretend to any thing of theirs by Right of Barter or Exchange. This, and this only, is the Way to disseise him of his Estate, to cancel those fa-  
tal

tal Indentures which bound them to him, and till this be done, as long as they keep any Part of his Wages of Iniquity, his Title remains in full Force, they are still his Servants, his Vassals.

16. Even the Redemption of Christ has no Efficacy towards the enfranchizing of such; for though it proclaim an universal Jubilee, yet it forces Liberty upon none; he that will nail his Ear to the Door-post and defy a Manumission, may continue his slavish Life still, and indeed, though Christ's Death was designed to rescue us from the Power of Satan, yet the first Essay of that Rescue was to redeem us from our vain Conversation: And where that is not done, which is so essentially fundamental to all the rest, it is not possible any other Part of that Redemption should be atchieved, unless we will confound that Order of Nature as well as Grace, and make the Consequent precede the Antecedent.

*otherwise no Benefit by Christ's Redemption.*

17. Let no Man therefore, upon any vain Hopes, delay the one only Expedient to his Security, but pay back the Earnest-penny he has received from Satan, sling away his Sin, how pleasant or profitable soever, with the greatest Abhorrence, as knowing it is the Price of Blood, and that not only his Saviour's, but his own too; and this immediately, lest the Forfeiture be irreversible. We know the Danger of lapsing Time, in case of Mortgage, but here our Danger is greater, because the Time is so uncertain; for though God had nothing else to do in the whole Transaction (it was wholly our own Work) yet it is he that assigns the Time of Forfeiture: He alone knows how far we may go on in Sin, before we may pass the Possibility of a Retreat;

*The great Danger of obstinate persisting in any one Sin;*

treat ; how long he will be provoked before he suffer his whole Displeasure to arise, and how many Repellings of his Grace, and Quenchings of his Spirit they are, to which his Desertions are appor-tioned. *Pharaoh's* Heart was hardened by God after the eighth Resistance, and we have no Security but ours may be sooner, yet if that should be taken as the standing Measure, how dreadful an Abode would it make to many of us ? Who is there that has espoused any one beloved Sin, that has not much oftner repeated the Acts of it, every one of which is a Resistance and Contumacy against God ? Who is there that has not done it against so many express Warnings and loud Calls of God in his own Conscience ? which renders it yet a fuller Parallel, and it is to be feared, too many agree with it, even in the last and highest Circumstance, that of the Plagues too, by an obstinate persisting, after so many Judgments sent to mollify and reclaim them ; and then where the Premises are the same, it is too likely the Conclusion may be so also.

*the Guilt* 18. I shall not wish any Person so  
*whereof is* strictly to apply this Case, as to con-  
*greater in* clude, that he is already in this State,  
*Christians* but I could wish all Men would apply  
*than Hea-* it so far, as to infer how possible, nay  
*thens,* how probable it is, that the very next  
 Resistance shall put them in it. It is

not *Pharaoh's* being a Heathen, and they Christians, that will give them any Security ; it being no Part of the Gospel-covenant, that Men shall be ever the longer allowed to trample upon Grace. All the Difference it makes is rather on the other Side ; the Contempts are enhanced to a higher Guilt, and consequently, the fewer Acts may now serve to fill up the Measure. And if their Ex-perience testify to them, that, in their Particular,  
 God

God has used a greater Long-suffering than he has given any Grounds to expect, if the Guilt of their Consciences testify that they have committed many more Acts; and yet some remaining Tendernesses and Regrets witness also, that they are not yet given up to an utter Hardness and Obduration, O let them not presume themselves safe, because they are not utterly desperate; but lay their Hearts open to be stamped and impressed by Grace, before they grow utterly inflexible; timely consider what is the Design of this Longanimity, and without any more Strugglings and Resistance suffer it to attain its Aim, and lead them to Repentance.

19. For though their Souls be not yet wholly petrified, yet how know they in what an Instant that unhappy Metamorphosis may be wrought; or if it should not be so sudden, yet it is certain every Act of Sin makes gradual Approaches towards it: So that if God should not inflict it by Way of Punishment, yet the mere Force of Habit would produce it by Way of natural Efficacy: And to be convinced of this, I should require no more, but that Men would reflect, and see what Effects it has already wrought, how far it has advanced towards that fatal Point. Let them send their Thoughts back through every Stage and Period of their Sin, and observe whether, as that has grown, so their Tenderness and Reluctance of Conscience has not abated and decreased: Let them but recollect what Regrets and Disquiets they had, when they ventured upon the first unlawful Commission, and compare it with their present, and I doubt not they will discern a great Inequality; they will find that every Act of Sin hath allayed somewhat of the Sharpness of those Pangs, and proportionably to the Frequency of the

*and disposeth to utter Hardness and Impenitency.*



Repetition they approach toward insensible : And then let him whose older Habit has multiplied those Acts, sadly consider how few Steps he has to the End of his unhappy Journey, though no extrinſick Concurrent ſhould haſten his Pace. But when God's Deſertion ſhall, as, for ought he knows, it may the next Minute ſupervene ; that as a full and violent Wind drives him in an Inſtant, not to the Harbour, but on the Rock where he will be irrecoverably ſplit.

*The Wilful-  
neſs of any  
Sin is the  
highest Ag-  
gravation  
thereof.*

20. Nor let any Man fortify himſelf againſt theſe Terrors, by hoping that his own ſingle (perhaps ſmall) Sin ſhall not have this destructive Force ; for, if it be wilful, it carries in it that which is properly the Malignity of all Sin, to wit, a Reſiſtance and Oppoſition againſt God, and this is ſo mortal a Venom, that the leaſt Doſe of it is deadly, as a Man may as certainly be poiſoned by a Dram of Arſenick, as with the largeſt Draught.

*The ſmalleſt  
Sin not to be  
allowed in.*

21. The more natural Inference lies the other Way, if it be but a ſingle or petty Sin, it is ſo much the eaſier to part with ; he that is bound with a ſtrong Cable, or with a Multitude of leſſer Cords, may pretend ſome Neceſſity of his Captivity, from the Strength of his Bonds ; but he that is tied with one ſlender String, ſuch as one reſolute Struggle would be ſure to break, he is Priſoner only to his own Sloth or Humour, and who will pity his Thralldom, where it is ſo apparently his Choice ? Do not therefore ſay, My Sin is inconfiderable, and therefore I need not relinquish it ; but, My Sin is inconfiderable, therefore I need not keep it. So ſlight a Pleaſure I may part with and find no Miſs : This pedling Profit I may reſign,  
and

and it will be no Breach in my Estate. And if Christ require a Renunciation of those Sins which are as the Hand and Eye, shall I scruple to deposite those which are but as the Hair or Nails?

22. Nay, he may yet argue higher, and from the Smallness of the Sin deduce the Enhancement of the Guilt: Great Acquisitions carry some Temptation in their Face, but despicable Prizes do rather avert than tempt. It was the Sign of a common Harlot

*The lesser  
the Sin, the  
greater the  
Guilt in not  
parting with  
it.*

to be hired with a Kid, *Gen. xxxviii.* and sure he must be of a strange prostitute Soul, that can adulterate for such low trivial Wages. To dishonour God, though the whole World were to be acquired by it, were great Impiety; but to do it for *handfuls of barley and pieces of bread, Ezek. xiii. 19.* himself brands as a yet higher Pitch. And sure it argues a very light Esteem of God, when one poor contemptible Lust shall be able to overpoize him in our Hearts.

23. Nor is the Folly less than the Profaneness, when there is but one *Jonah* to be cast over-board, it is the greater Madness to hazard a Wreck; and let such a Man pretend what he pleases in Extenuation of his Sin,

*Folly to en-  
danger our  
Souls for a  
single Lust,*

make that appear never so minute and despicable, yet it is apparent all the Love which other Men scatter and distribute upon several, he has united and centred in this one Lust. The most dotting Affection, when it is summed up, can amount to no more than this, that it makes a Man expose himself to the greatest Pain, the greatest Loss for the Thing beloved. And this is most visible here: Hell is as certainly acquired, and Heaven as certainly forfeited by one Sin as many; and then, though there may

be Odds in other Respects, yet what is there in this, between this more modest and the most licentious Sinner, but that the former puts the same Value upon one, that the other does upon many Sins, and sells his Soul so much the cheaper.

*the Pleasure  
and Profit  
whereof is  
but small.*

24. And now would God such Men would review their Bargain, soberly consider what there is in this idolized Sin of theirs, which should exact such costly Sacrifices. Let him whose long Intimacy and Experience has given him Access to its most secret Recesses, that has rifled its Bowels, and knows the utmost, whether of Pleasure or Profit, that lies there concealed: Let him, I say, that is thus qualified for it, make an exact Inventory of its Wealth, and then let him compare it with what he is to pay for it; weigh its flat and momentary Pleasures, with those most transcending and perpetual Joys which are at God's Right-hand; its base and perishing Commodities, with those unfailing Treasures in Heaven; and then judge of his Purchase, in respect of that Part of his Price; and if that be not Convincement enough, let him weigh the other also; those sad Pains which are too intolerable to be suffered, and yet so eternal, that they can never cease to be suffered, and think whether that be not too dear a Rate for that Pleasure, whose Gust is so little, and whose Duration is less: Or what Profit he will have in the Revenue of his Sin, that Gold and Silver which will finally eat his flesh as it were fire, *James v. 3.* and prove the unhappy Fuel of his Flames.

*All Sin and Vice  
to be entirely re-  
nounced.*

25. From all these Premises, certainly Reason and Religion do equally infer the same Conclusion, to wit, that Men should  
not

not tolerate themselves one Minute in any known Sin, of how small a Size soever it be; nor so impertinently betray their Souls to Ruin, for that which they call light and trivial, and is so indeed in respect of the Acquest, but overwhelmingly ponderous in regard of the Effects and pernicious Consequents. And O that Mens Practices might evince them to have made this just Deduction, that those who have in many Things preserved an Innocence, would not be so ill Husbands as to forfeit all the Advantage of that Care, for want of extending it a little farther, nor suffer the whiter Parts of their Soul to be discoloured, or tinged by the Reflexion of one crimson Sin; but rather let their Tears wash that into a Whiteness, that they may be uniform and of a piece. For though *Jacob* clad his darling *Joseph* in a party-coloured Garment; yet God owns none either for favourite Son, or so much as Servant, that he finds so arrayed. The Followers of the Lamb are all clad in white, and in that Attire we must be sure to put ourselves, if we mean to go in with him to the Marriage. And since the Gospel is the Invitation to that Feast, let none imagine he has complied with it till he have thus fitted himself; till then he affronts and baffles his Christianity, sends it away empty without its Errand; nay, which is worse, prostitutes and profanes it, makes it serve only for a Gourd, that he may sit under the Shadow of it, and commit his Sins the more undisturbed; but let him remember, that he is all this while breeding that Worm, which will smite this Gourd, and leave him unheltered to that scorching Wrath of God, which will make the Improvement of *Jonah's* passionate Wish, that God would take away his Life, his most rational Desire, render not Death only, but Annihilation also, as eligible as it will be impossible.



C H A P. VII.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from Mistakes concerning Repentance.*

*Great Mistakes about Repentance :*

1. **A** Nother dangerous Underminer of Christian Practice is the many affected Mistakes in the Business of Repentance. Men look upon

that as the grand Recipe of the Gospel, and infallible Catholicon against all their spiritual Maladies ; and so far they judge right, for-so indeed it is. But when they proceed to compound this sovereign Medicine for their own Use, they do it most deceitfully, leave out the principal and most operative Ingredients ; and by being such ill Apothecaries, defame the Gospel as the Dispensatory, and Christ as the Physician, and likewise ruin themselves as the Patients. But of those who make this imperfect and defective Composition, all do it not alike ; some leave out one Part, some another, and some so many, that they retain nothing of its Substance and Reality ; eat out all the Heart and Virtue of it, and leave only an empty Shell, the Gilding, as it were, of the Pill, the Form and mere Outside of Repentance.

*Some place Repentance only in outward Gestures and Appearances ;*

2. In this latter Rank I place those who suffer Repentance to pass no farther than their Frontiers and Outworks, assign it its Quarters in the Superficies of the Man, the Face, or Tongue, or Gesture ; but if it attempt to penetrate any deeper, if it send but one serious Thought to alarm the Heart, then, like the Edomites against Israel, Numb.

## Chap. VII. concerning Repentance. 127

*Numb. xx.* all the Forces are mustered to impede its Passage ; such formal Penitents as these all Ages have produced. Christ tells us of those who disfigured their Faces, *Matth. vi. 16.* put on, as it were, a Vizard, only to act this Part : And *Isaiah lviii. 5.* long before describes them, by the *bowing down the head like a bulrush*, and certainly the Race of them is not worn out in our Days ; a demure or rather a lugubrious Look, a sad or whining Tone, makes up, it is to be feared, the Sum of many Mens Humiliations. Nay, as the World has of late gone, that alone were but a modest Pretence : Such theatrical Forms stickle hard for the Prize, not of that one Part, but of all Religion : A distorted Countenance is made the Mark of an upright Heart, and none is thought to speak the Language of *Canaan*, that dresses it not in an uncouth Sound : And then, what Wonder is it, that they are impatient others should worship God, as *David* invites, *in the beauty*, while themselves choose to do it, in the Deformity of holiness.

3. But others make somewhat a fairer Advance towards Repentance, by taking in some of those Things which are indeed its necessary Concomitants ; of this Kind is, in the first place, Confession of Sin ; and this after some sort, is stuck at by few ; no Man who hath not herded himself with the worst sort of Fanaticks, imagines himself sinless, or pretends to be thought so by others, but will very readily acknowledge to all the World that he is a Sinner ; and as to Men, so especially and more solemnly to God. Every Man that but offers at praying at all, thinks Confession a necessary Branch of his Devotion : All publick Forms have ever carried that in the Front, as supposing it the most principal, universal,

*others in a bare Acknowledgment and Confession of Sin.*

verfal, and daily Requisite to the Lapsing State of human Corruption; and perhaps it is the general innate Persuasion of this, that hath secured that Part of our Liturgy from those impertinent Cavils, which have particularly aimed at most other Members of it. And I suppose this is as frequent in the Closet as in the Church; the only Fear is, that there it is as loose and general too; that those private and particular Guilts, which are neither fit nor possible to be distinctly inserted in publick do many times lose their Place even in private Confessions also. The Shortness and the Ease of general Forms being very likely to recommend them to those whose numerous Sins threaten too great a Length, and whose confused snarled Consciences render it difficult, thus to pull out Thread by Thread; but where Sins are thus moulded up in a Lump, they will, like great Masses of Pills or Confections, keep the more undecayed; retain more of their Strength and Vigour. So that such Confessions are very indulgent to Satan's Interest, who fears not the Impressions that can be made upon him, while his Body remains entire; the great Execution then beginning when it is broken and scattered, and each Sin is singled out for a particular Pursuit; and where that is not attempted, the War can never be successful; nor thought in earnest.

4. But suppose this be done, and  
*Confession of Sin without forsaking it, is unacceptable to God.* by exact Enumeration each Sin is parted from its Fellows, as when a Conqueror pursues the flying Troops of routed Enemies; yet, if this be all, if Quarter be allowed, and any Mercy given, no real Prize is gained by this Atchievement. He who recounts his Sins with milder Purpose towards them than utter

ter Excision, he makes no Approach toward the essential Part of Repentance. He may bring out large Catalogues of his Sins, and call them Confessions; but he may better express his own Sense, if he term them rather Inventories of his Goods, for such it is apparent he reckons them, whilst he resolves to keep them. Indeed there is not a more absurd Piece of Pageantry, than these formal Confessions, and such as shews how little God is considered in his great Attribute, *the Searcher of hearts*. It is certain no Man would hope to atone an offended Superior, by a submissive Acknowledgment of his Fault, did he know that his Purpose of reiterating it were discerned: And what a tacite Blasphemy is it then, to treat God at such a Rate, as presumes him as deceivable as a poor Mortal? and sure this were a strange Ingredient in Repentance. We look on it as a high Pitch of Impiety boasting to avow our Sins, and it deserves to be considered, whether this kind of confessing them have not some Affinity with it. Should I tell a Man, I have injured and provoked you thus and thus, and so I resolve to do again at the next Opportunity: I refer it to common Construction, whether this were not to justify, not retract, the Unkindness. Now what I suppose thus said to Man, is in the secret Purpose of our Heart, no less articulately spoken to God, who needs not our Words to discern our Meaning. Therefore, whoever intends to repeat his Sins, nay does not seriously intend to forsake them, does in Truth maintain and defend his vicious Practice, how loudly soever his Tongue accuses it. And such Clamours are but like the feigned Quarrels of combined Cheats, in order to delude some third Person. But, alas, the Scene is here unluckily laid, for God will not be mocked, nor will the Mercy promised to him that confesseth and forsaketh, ever reach him that



that confesseth and retaineth. Confession is no farther acceptable than as it either flows from, or tends to beget an Abhorrence of Sin, and abstracted from those Qualifications it becomes loathsome and distasteful to God. Alas, can we think our Historical Vein so pleasant, that he shall be delighted with the Narrative of those Crimes, whose Perpetration he detested? Can it be Incense in his Nostrils, to have our Dunghills displayed? Or can his pure Eyes be gratified with such polluted Prospects? True, indeed, he gladly descends to all this as a Physician; nauseates not our foulest Ulcers, when we bring them for Cure; but when, like Beggars, we make them openly our Form of Address, and dread nothing more than their Healing, certainly their View will only excite his Indignation, not his Pity. And this, it is to be feared, abodes sadly to many of us; it is our vulgar Objection to the *Romanists*, that they make their Confessions contributive rather to their Confidence than to their Reformation: What their Share is in that Guilt, I shall not here examine, but I may too truly pronounce they have not inclosed it; that black Circle, of sin and confess, confess and sin, encompasses as well Protestants as Papists; if possible, not quite so many, the Cause, it is doubtful, is (what we need not boast) not that more of us confess aright, but that fewer confess at all. But of those that do, if we may but cross-examine, and interrogate their Actions against their Words, these will soon confess (and that not auricularly, but in a loud and audible Voice) the Invalidity of their solemnest Confessions. When we see a Man that Yesterday kept a Humiliation, to day trampling on the Necks, invading the Possessions of his Brethren, we need no other Proof how vainly and unprofitably, if not how hypocritically and provokingly he confessed his Pride, or Covetousness:

vetousness : And the like we may infer when we see any Man persevere in any gross wilful Sin. And of such, God knows, there are such Multitudes, as will give us Instances more than enough, how wide a Difference there is between a mere Confident and a true Penitent.

5. But, in the next place, a passionate Regret at Sin, a Grief and Sadness at its Memory, more speciously pretends to enter us into God's Roll of Mourners : Sorrow has (in vulgar Acceptation) so ingrossed the whole Notion of Repentance, that Men are apt to secure themselves, that the Wind of a penitential Sigh is so mighty, as will blow away the Guilt of the most mountainous Sin : That if they have but wept a little upon their Crimes, they have quite extinguished the Wrath they kindled : But alas these are vain Dreams, God who *delights not to grieve the children of men*, does not project for our Sorrow, but our Innocence, and would never have invited us to the one, but as an Expedient to the other. It is natural even to mere Animals to shun that by which they have smarted, and therefore Sorrow for Sin is a very proper Means to avert our Appetite from it : But if we have learned the unhappy Skill of separating the Effect from the Cause ; if our Grief abate not our Love ; if we can cast kind Looks at our Sins, even through those Tears wherewith our Eyes are glazed, this will sure be as far from accomplishing our Design as God's ; leave us equally unpardoned as unreformed.

*Some place  
Repentance  
only in ex-  
ternal Grief  
and Sorrow  
for Sin.*

6. Nay,

*Mere Sorrow  
without Amend-  
ment, doth but  
aggravate our  
Guilt,*

6. Nay, alas, such Sorrows as these will rather serve to enhance than expiate our Guilts; they are loud Witnesses against us, that we know the Malignity of those Sins we commit; that we have poized them, and find them as a Talent of Lead upon our Souls, and yet prefer them before Christ's light Burden; that we have outvied that perverse Election wherewith *Elihu* charges *Job*, and chosen Affliction rather than Innocence, *Job xxxvi. 21.* and though we have felt the gnawing of the worm, yet still resolve to cherish it, till it gains its woful Concomitant of *unquenchable fire*; and sure this Resolvedness, this high Fortitude in Sin, can with no Reason be imagined a Preparative to its Remission, it will rather serve to list us among Satan's Martyrs, than God's Penitents.

*and is of no Avail  
towards our Par-  
don.*

7. And, indeed, if we examine the Original of this kind of Sorrow, what is there that can, with any face, pretend to an Acceptation? Alas! it is apparent there is no Dislike to the Sin; for the natural Effect of that would be the abandoning it. If I have fallen into the Mire, common Reason directs me, not to sit down and cry that I am so defiled; but to cleanse and wash myself, and beware of such another Misadventure. Now God's Enmity is purely with the Sin: And if we think to contract a League with him; we must espouse his Quarrel, hate what he hates: But in this Case it is quite otherwise, we dislike only the Consequents, not the Crime; are dissatisfied to see that what is so pleasant, will not be safe: Detest those temporal or eternal Miseries, which God has annexed to it; which is, upon the Matter to grieve, not because  
we

we are guilty, but God is just ; and to avert only that Part of the Evil, of which he owns to be the Author, that of Punishment ; whilst that of Sin, as our own Creature, we dandle and caress. And can we think it sufficient to atone an incensed Majesty, that we love our own Ease, while yet we love our Sin so much better ? Is it a Virtue to have some ineffective Regrets to Damnation, and such a Virtue too, as shall serve to balance all our Vices ? This were indeed a compendious Course to block up Hell-gates, and leave none a Possibility of ever getting thither, but those who scaled the Wall, and desperately resolved to possess themselves of that Place of Torment. But, alas, they are other Fruits of Repentance that must deliver us *from the wrath to come* : For though I deny not, that the Apprehension of Danger is extremely both reasonable and useful, yet it is only by way of Preparative ; it is like the Trumpet that gives the Alarm, and sets us to the Battle, but it must not pretend to be like those of *Gideon* that atchieved the whole Victory. To see our Danger, may occasion, but does not cause, or necessarily infer, an Escape. I may madly leap into that Pit which I see gaping to swallow me, and then my Foresight serves only to render me my own Murderer. In short, if that formidable Aspect of our Sins, make us run from them, it has done us the happiest Office, *plucked us*, as *St. Jude* says, *out of the fire* ; but if our Love be so doting, as to counter-charm our Fear, if we be so bewitched with the *deceitfulness of sin*, that we will have its Embraces, though we know them deadly ; if we weep that we have sinned, and yet go on to sin ; our wilful Guilt will defile our Tears, but our Tears will never cleanse our Guilt. We only assist in the Judicature against ourselves, and to God's Condemnation add



our own ; and what we call our Penitence, becomes a sad Attestation of our Incurribleness.

8. And as this mere Sorrow will never avail, so neither will a partial and imperfect Reformation, and that whether it be defective in respect of the Kind, or of the Duration : To the former we have spoken elsewhere, and shall not need to repeat : But of the latter there will need no

less Caution, Men being apt to obtrude Fallacies on themselves in this as much as in the other. Every transient Glean of Piety is concluded to be that Flame in which the Holy Ghost descended, and though it want the main Circumstance of resting on them, yet serves to personate the Comforter. He that, whilst the Soreness of his late Pangs of Conscience remains, finds himself a little indisposed for a new Career in Sin, presently concludes Repentance hath had its perfect Work in him, made that Change and Transmutation, which certainly denominates him a new Creature, and pronounces his vicious Appetites extinct and mortified, when, alas, they are but strewed over with a little penitential Ashes, and will, as soon as they meet with combustible Matter, any apt Temptation, flame out as fierce as ever : And God knows the Event does too often actually attest this, after all the Ablutions and Purification of their Repentance, their next Work is to divest themselves of their white Robe, and those whom Yesterday you saw in the Laver, to day you shall find wallowing in the Mire, and as with far the more Guilt, so sometimes with much the greater Confidence, for having been so washed ; yet so strongly are some Mens Fancies possessed with their imaginary Purity, that they are the last that take notice how the Scene is changed ; they comfort

fort themselves, that Sin and they have had some little Skirmishes, though but preparatory to a closer League ; that they had fixed good Purposes, though there remain nothing visible but their Violation, and so will call themselves Christ's Sheep, though their notorious Impurities witness them to belong only to that Herd into which the Legion entered.

9. This is a Deceit which one would think should immediately detect itself, but it is strange to see, how our Wishes can prescribe to our Faith ; and what a more than omnipotent Power our Self-love has in reconciling Contradictions : Yet I can scarce think this innate Strength of Corruption had been sufficient for the Purpose, had it not had the auxiliary Aid of some commodious Doctrines. My present Design is so far from controversial, that I am loth to point out any to which I must express Unkindness ; yet, upon this Occasion, I shall refer it to Consideration, whether that Method which has been used to quiet some Consciences, be not very apt to stupify more. When I see one who, from his present reigning Sins, regularly infers the Illness of his State, that is yet, by his Casuist, diverted from that Prospect, and bid look back to see, whether no Part of his Life afforded any Evidence of true Grace ; and if he can but remember any such Time, is warranted to make that his Epocha, from whence to date his infallible Assurance, is told, that that immortal Seed, though it may be covered, yet cannot be choaked, but will most certainly spring up unto eternal Life : When, I say, I see this easy Remedy prescribed to his Fears, it will be obvious for me to compound myself an Antidote from the same Ingredients ; to fix my Eye upon some Mark of Regeneration which, at

*These Mistakes are occasioned by a wrong Method of quieting Peoples Consciences,*

some time or other, I either have, or fancied to have had upon me; and with the stedfast beholding of that, as of the brazen Serpent; be fortified against all the Venom of my fiery Lusts; cast in this one Stick, and with it sweeten all the Waters of *Marah*, secure me against all the bitter Effects of my present Guilt. How fatal an Influence such Discourings as these are apt to have on Practice, is too obvious both in the Cause and Effect: I need not examine the Authority of that grand Principle on which they are founded; since if that were admitted, yet it will not justify the before-mentioned Superstructure: For, suppose it received as an infallible Truth, that Grace, if true, can never be lost; yet it is by the Confession of all, so easy to be deceived in judging what is so, and our Partialities to ourselves are so likely to betray us to that Deceit; that these Corollaries Men deduce thence for their personal Assurance, can never partake of the supposed Infallibility of those Premises they derive from, and consequently are much too slight a Basis for Men to trust with so great a Weight as is that of their present Comfort and future State.

*and by (defer-  
ring or)  
putting off  
the Work of  
Repentance  
till Sickness  
or Death.*

10. Several other pernicious Errors there are in the Matter of Repentance which Men fall into, shall I say, or rather aspire to; make it their Ambition to be under their Covert and Patronage, and with extreme Violence to their Reason as well as Religion, climb up to those Castles in the Air, and there fortify themselves impreguably against all the sacred Artillery of divine Threats. Their false Confidences serve them as Feather-beds, not only to sleep securely in, but to dead all Bullets that are shot against them: But of all those deceitful Refuges, there

there is none more treacherous, and yet more confidently and universally resorted to, than that of a Repentance in Reverſion, to commence, no body knows when, ſome Months or Years hence, when this Buſineſs is diſpatched, that Luſt ſatiated; or, indeed, to bear the ſame Date (if not a later) with their Laſt-will and Teſtament. This is that unhappy Retreat to which Thouſands fly, as the routed *Syrians* to *Aphck*, 1 *Kings* xx. 30. till they are entombed in that Wall whoſe Shelter they ſolicited: How deſperate the Hazard of ſuch Procratination is, hath been ſo convincingly demonſtrated by better Pens; that Trumpet hath been blowed ſo loud by all our ſpiritual Watchmen, that there remains nothing ſeaſonable, but to wonder whence Men have got that *Lethé* which ſecures them their Sleep in ſpite of that Alarm: And certainly it is Matter of the greateſt Aſtoniſhment to obſerve the ſtupid, yet common Boldneſs of Men, who ſo fearleſſly expoſe themſelves to this moſt formidable of Perils; who yet, in Things of far leſs Danger and lighter Conſequence, are ſo nicely timorous, that no Security is thought enough, every the remotest Danger to their outward Concerns, excites their preſent Vigilance to avert it: But here that Order is moſt abſurdly inverted, and the preſent imminent Danger is aſſigned and put off to their future Care. Let the Phyſician tell them he obſerves ſome Symptoms of a latent Malady, ſome Aptitudes or firſt Cauſes of a Diſeaſe, what Haſte is there made to meet that Enemy in the Frontiers, before it advance too far? All Arts of Prevention are uſed, and ſuch uneaſy Remedies ſubmitted to, as, perhaps, out-bid the Pain of the Diſeaſe. In like manner, let a Lawyer tell them he has ſpied ſome Defect in an Entail, which may, perhaps, in the next Age, give ſome Interruption to their Deſign, of having their Houſes endure



for ever, *Psal. xlvii.* How solicitous are they to repair that Error, and leave nothing to the Mercy of a Law-quirk? and, in both Cases, thank the vigilant Care of their Informer, that gave them Notice of their Danger: But let the Divine tell them, he sees their Souls languishing under the most mortal Diseases; that they have actually forfeited their Inheritance in the Land of the Living, they can hear it unconcernedly, say, or at least think, those Cares are to be remitted to *Felix* his more convenient Season, that when their Bodies are as infirm as their Souls, then Care may be taken for both together. That it is enough for their spiritual Life to commence, when the natural is expiring, and then to provide for everlasting Habitations, when they are putting off their earthly Tabernacle: As for the Thanks they give their Monitor, it is generally the same that *St. Paul* received from the *Galatians*, to count him their enemy for telling them the truth, *Gal. iv. 16.* But alas, he has no Reason to resent the Injury, since it is but the same they offer to their nearest and most intimate Friend, that Angel Guardian which God and Nature has placed within their own Breasts, I mean their Conscience: Let that at any time whisper the same Admonition, and immediately they cry out as *Ahab* to *Elijah*, *Hast thou found me, O my enemy?* All Arts are used to convey themselves out of its Reach? Business, or Company, or Drink, or any thing, is solicited to come in to their Rescue, that, in that Throng they may deceive its Pursuit, or, at least, in that louder Noise, drown its Voice; and is not this to look on it as their Enemy, while they shun it as a Malefactor does the Officer? Yet I appeal to the Breasts of those, who lean upon the broken Reed of a late Repentance, whether this be not the Case with them: Let them tell me, whether they dare  
trust

Chap. VII. concerning Repentance. 139

trust themselves alone with their Conscience, give it Opportunity of speaking freely to them, of laying before them the mad Adventure they make of their precious Souls, which they do not only expose to as many Hazards of a swift Damnation, as there are Accidents which may surprize their Bodies with a sudden Death; but do besides, by this Resistance, repel and quench that Spirit, without which they can never hope to effect that so necessary, so difficult a Work; nay, I may, I fear, ask of some of them, whether they have not so often shunned these Parleys, that their Consciences, like an abused Friend, has at last given them over, ceased to pursue them with more of those unwelcome Importunities; and by its Silence, left them secured from all Noise which may disturb that treacherous Sleep into which they have lulled themselves. To those who are thus given up to the Spirit of Slumber, I cannot hope to speak loud enough to rouse them; but to those that are but of the former Rank, that have not yet so prospered in their unkind Design against themselves, as quite to have alienated their Bosom-friend, that are yet within the Reach of those *amica verbera*, the Stripes and Reproofs of their own Conscience, to such I would address with this most affectionate Petition, that they would not seek to remove themselves from that wholsome Discipline, that they would not fly that Surgeon whose Lancet threatens none but the impostumated Parts; but rather choose to be shewed the Formidableness of their Danger, than by a blind Embracing it, to perish in it. And if they have but any general confused Inclinations to this so reasonable Request, I shall then put on more Solemnity, assume to come as an Envoy from those dreaded Consciences of theirs, to mediate an Interview, to propose the fixing some Time of Parley, and bespeak their Patience

to hear it out: And let them but grant this, let them but dare to do so much in order to their own Safety, and I can scarce think it possible they should after retain that Daring, which only tends to their Ruin. In a word, let Men seriously and attentively listen to that Voice within them, and they will certainly need no other Medium to convince them either of the Error or Danger of thus procrastinating their Repentance, which themselves acknowledge must not, upon their utmost Peril, be finally omitted, and yet nothing but an immediate Dispatch can secure it shall not.

*True Repentance must be universal, lasting, present, and undelayed.*

II. It will be needless to descend to a particular View of more of these Deceits, they will easily be detected by this one general Rule, that whatsoever falls short of a present, universal, permanent Change, falls as much short of Repentance. All the

Pretences that are made upon any other Score, are but as the Garments of the elder Brother, put upon the Back of the younger, which, though they might delude a blind *Isaac*, will never be able to deceive an all-seeing God. All that remains is to offer to the Reader's Consideration, how nearly he is concerned to guard himself against all Delusions in this so important an Affair. It was an ancient Stratagem of War, to poison the Waters in an Enemy's Camp, that so they may drink their own Deaths: But Satan has here far out-vied that Policy. Were but our Nourishment infected, we had still a Recourse left us to Medicine; but here he has envenomed our very Physick, and what Cure remains for those whose very Remedies are their Disease? When that Bath which was designed to cleanse us, is itself polluted, we may well cry out,

as *Dionysius* of the corrupted River of *Alexandria*,  
 ποιον γενοισο αν παντα καθαριση & υδα & υδα  
 αλλο καθαρισιον; What Flood shall cleanse these  
 Waters? Where can we be secure, when our Re-  
 pentance (which the Apostle, 2 *Tim.* ii. 26. sup-  
 poses the Means of disentangling us) is itself become  
 our Snare? This as it loudly proclaims our Danger,  
 so surely, in all Reason it should awake our Care,  
 teach us not to suffer ourselves to be abused with  
 delusive Appearances and Shadows of Repentance,  
 lest we finally find that, *Ixion*-like, we have em-  
 braced a Cloud. What an amazing Defeat will it be  
 to him, who presumes his Tears have blotted out  
 the Hand-writing against him, to find the full Bill  
 brought in at the great Assize, and those he called  
 his penitential Sorrows here, to prove but the Pro-  
 logue to that Tragedy which ends in weeping and  
 gnashing of teeth! And therefore, let every one  
 timely provide against that fatal Surprise, use this  
 excellent Receipt, not as a Cosmetick only, to beau-  
 tify the Face, give him some fair Appearance to  
 himself, but as Medicine to restore Health, reduce  
 him to such an athletick vigorous Habit, as may  
 evidence itself in all vital Actions, which will prove  
 the best Evidences in our last Trial, where the In-  
 quisition will not be so much upon our Mouths or  
 Eyes, as upon our Hands; nor how many Confes-  
 sions we have made, or how many Tears shed, but  
 what Acts of Virtue we have substituted in the room  
 of our Vices; whether we have broken off our Sins  
 by Righteousness, and our Iniquities by shewing  
 mercy to the poor; and without this it is infallibly  
 certain, our Christianity will be as ineffectual to our  
 Bliss, as it is to our Piety; if we will not permit  
 it here to bring us to the Obedience of Servants, it  
 shall never instate us hereafter in the Inheritance of  
 Sons.



## C H A P. VIII.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from Mistakes concerning Almighty God, and the Methods of his Providence.*

*Mistakes concerning God are dangerous.* 1. **T**O these Mistakes of ourselves and Interests, we have added others also concerning God,

which are no less destructive to Christian Practice; for as the right Knowledge of God is by our Saviour, *John xvii. 3.* put as the Epitome and Sum of all that leads to Bliss, so our Misprisions and Misapprehensions of him, are no less remarkable for the contrary Effects; nor can we suppose it otherwise, when we remember that this is the grand Work and Basis of all Religion, and therefore, if this Foundation be deceitfully laid, the Superstructure must necessarily sink and perish: And in this Sense it is possible for us at once to build on the Rock and the Sand too; we may fix our Faith intentionally on God, and yet by absurd Notions, and unwarranted Conceits of him, defeat in the Particulars what we established in the Gross; represent him so utterly distant from what he is, that under that Disguise he will not much appear, either an Encourager or Rewarder of our Piety, and then we may guess how it is likely to flourish; since the Apostle gives it as a fundamental Axiom, *Heb. xi. 6.* that *he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

2. Of these Mistakes concerning God, there are divers; many more than the designed Brevity

Brevity of this Discourse will admit me to examine. I shall only mention three : Those are, First, concerning his Decrees, Secondly, his Attributes, Thirdly, his Providence.

3. By his Decrees, I mean not those standing Rules which he has in his Word set forth as the Measures by which he will distribute Rewards and Punishments ; but those secret Purposes of his Will, which he neither commands us to search after, nor will permit us to know. That there are many Mistakes concerning these, the

*The first Instance of Mistake is concerning God's Decrees, which they oft oppose to his revealed Will ;*

numberless Disputes that have been raised about them, will sufficiently attest, it being impossible for two contradictory Opinions to be both true, tho', in Things of this abstruse Nature, it is very possible both may be false. It is not my Purpose to wade into those bottomless Controversies, which, like a Gulph, have swallowed up so much Time and Industry of learned Men : I shall only, in general, commend it to the Reader's Consideration, whether it be probable, or indeed possible, for those Opinions to be true which infer Falschood in God ? And then let the second Enquiry be, whether that be not too evidently the Result of those Discourses which set an Opposition between his revealed and his secret Will, his Commands and his Decrees, making the one a Blind for the better Execution of the other ? as if all the Transportation and Zeal he expresses for us, all the passionate enamouring Invitations he makes to us, were only to sport himself with our Credulity ; like the Divertisement of those Men, who court them for Wives, whom they would abhor to marry : Nay, as if all the Protestations and most solemn Oaths of God, were designed

signed but to advance the Delusion, and raise Expectations, merely to defeat them. This is such a severe sort of Irony, as we would all think not only unkind but unjust in a Man; and it is not possible that God, who appeals to us concerning the Equality of his Ways, should fall short of the strictest Measures among us, or exemplify to us an Inincerity he forbids us to follow.

4. How very inauspicious Influence such Doctrines are apt to have on Practice is too visible; for since it is as well the Instinct as Duty of our Nature to aspire to an Assimilation with God, even that most laudable and generous Ambition shall, by this means, become our Snare; for when God shall be thus misrepresented to us, drawn out by the black Lines not only of Severity, but Deceit, rendered a Falsifier of his Word, nay Oath, it will give not only Temptation but Warrant to the like Practices: We shall easily swallow up all the particular Commands of God, in that fundamental one of being like him, as we are taught himself has done both his Commands and Promises in his hidden Decrees. This is so natural a Piece of Logick, that it is very unsafe Men should be trusted with those Premises whence it is derived. And though we are not over apt to transcribe that Copy God does really set us, yet this spurious one will not miss to be taken out; that Pravity of our Nature which hinders in the one, exciting and spurring us on in the other. This is a Way to reconcile our Vices with our Reputation, and *sin cum privilegio*; and there is little doubt of Mens Aptness to use that Advantage; we see it in lower Instances. The Vices of a Prince draw Shoals of Followers, when his Virtue leaves him the more eminent, because single, and renders him

him rather revered than imitated : And, certainly, it was none of the Devil's slightest Stratagems on the *Gentile* World, to give them such Gods as might exemplify to them all those odious Crimes, wherein he desired to immerse them. Whether this may not be a Branch of the same Illusion, I wish the Propugners of this Doctrine would seriously consider.

5. And as several Ills are hereby countenanced and authorised, so is all Virtue in general discouraged and disheartened ; this benumbs us in our Christian Course, subtracts that Spirit and Vigour which should carry us through the weary Stages of Duty :

*and are a great Hindrance to our Progress in Holiness.*

Indeed it cuts the very Sinews of Industry, baffles and makes ridiculous all Purposes of Labour ; for what should invite a Man to strive for that, from which he knows he is either irreversibly precluded, or else so infallibly ascertained of, that his Negligence cannot defeat him ? These are such Extremes as afford no Middle, wherein the Virtue of Industry may exist, Hope being equally out-dated by the Desperateness or Unnecessariness of an Undertaking : And how necessary Hope is to excite Endeavour, we may learn of *St. Paul*, 1 *Cor.* xv. 58, where he presses his *Corinthians* to the Constancy of Christian Practice upon this Ground, that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. But, according to some Mens Doctrine, it is scarce possible for a Man to know whether his Labour be in vain or no, since the Effect of it depends not, upon the revealed Promise, but secret Purpose of God, and who knows whether there may not lie some dormant Decrees against him, which, when he thinks he has run his Race, shall yet defeat him of his Crown. Whether a Reward thus stated will much animate Mens Dili-



gence, I may leave every Man to judge by the like Circumstances in their secular Concerns ; and if they find they would there damp their Courage, despirit and dishearten them from attempting, there will be surely more Reason to conclude it in these spiritual Affairs, wherein our Industry is commonly much less indefatigable.

6. But I shall not farther insist on the ill Consequences of particular Mistakes ; there is one fundamental Error, which, if it could be cured, would supersede all the rest ; I mean, our bold Folly in meddling with God's Decrees, which we call hidden, and yet ridiculously confute that Epithet, by pretending to know them.

This is so much an Insolence as forfeits the Comparison, which might belong to it as an Error ;, we see secular States zealously reserve their private Counsels ; and shall we think God so scrutable, ourselves so penetrating, that none of his Secrets can escape us ? Or if we think him, as indeed he is, unfathomable, why do we thus madly attempt what we confess impossible ? especially since we shall not only lose the Thing we so vainly pursue, but others which we might else enjoy. It is as if a Man should be so transported with a busy Earnestness of knowing his Prince's Secrets, as quite to forget his Laws, and incur capital Punishment. God has given us Rules of Life, which, upon the severest Penalties, he requires us to study and practise, and we divert from these, and make it our Business to trace his Counsels. We are gazing at the Stars to read our Destiny, and look not to our Feet, and, by that Negligence, experiment the worst Fate they could have portended : For, I think, we may say our wild Fancies about God's Decrees, have, in Event, reprobated

reprobated more than those Decrees, upon which they are so willing to charge their Ruin, and have bid fair to the damning of many, whom these left salvable. And indeed it is to be expected from divine Justice, that such bold Inquisitors should find nothing but their own Destruction. That Ark, which devoutly revered, brought Blessings, when curiously pried into: diffused Pestilence and Death, 1 Sam. vi. 19. Nay, the very Poets will tell us, that if we will have *Prometheus* his Fire, we must take *Pandora's* Box also: And sure Industry cannot be worse laid out than thus to fetch home Plagues, and while so much of it runs waste to such unhappy Purposes, it is no Wonder if we want for better; forget our Calling by contemplating our Predestination, and let the Opinion of our Fate be at once the Encouragement and Excuse of our Sloth, than which nothing can more evacuate the Purpose and Design of our Christianity, which Divines have truly designed to be not a contemplative but active Science.

7. To the same unhappy Effect concur our Mistakes of God's Attributes, if I may call them Mistakes, which seem to be rather wilful Nescience, they being so delineated to us both in his Word and his Providences, that it is not want of Light, but winking against it that must leave us ignorant. What the speculative

*The second Mistake is concerning God's Attributes, and concerning his Justice.*

Errors are in this Matter, concerns not my present Design to examine: But there seem to be some Misperceptions concerning the divine Attributes, which do remarkably tend, in their Consequence and Effect, to the corrupting Mens Manners; nay, look as if they were designed, and affectedly chosen for that Purpose, I mean especially, those concerning his Justice and Mercy, which being the Attri-

butes in which we have the most immediate Concern, the Errors in them are the more noxious and destructive. Of this Sort is that narrow scanty Notion too many have of God's Justice, which we measure not by him but ourselves, and therefore proportion it not according to his Infinity, but our own Concerns; that is an Attribute from which we promise to ourselves no Advantage, and therefore we are willing to contract and shrink it up, make it serve only as a Cypher to advance Mercy, but are unwilling to understand it in its proper Extent; think it a Word of Form, put in to complete the Greatness of God's Stile, rather than any intrinsic Part of his Nature, which he must deny himself to put off.

3. *Mistakes concerning God's Mercy, and our unequal Apprehensions thereof.* 8. Thus do we sacrilegiously steal from God a Part of his Being, and while other Sacrileges invade only his Patrimony, this commits a Riot upon his very Nature; yet, as if we meant the Proverb should indemnify us, and Exchange extinguish the Robbery, we add to another Attribute what we have defalked from

this, and amplify and extend his Mercy, as much as we confine and limit his Justice; that is, the one infinite Ocean, wherein not only we, but himself must be swallowed up. We will think of him under no other Notion, nor allow him to be any other Thing but what shall be in subserviency to this: We will have him powerful to relieve our Distresses, but not to revenge our Crimes; wise to defeat the Machinations of our Enemies, but not to circumvent our own indirect or impious Policies; all-seeing to behold our Wants and Grievs, but not to discern our closer Guilts; true to perform his Promises, but not his Threats. In short, we model  
all

all that is in God to our own Wishes, and instead of believing him what he is, fancy him what we would have him; like *Micah*, *Judges xvii. 5. making us a god* for our own peculiar Use, and forming the Deity we mean to worship; a strange bold Inversion, for Creatures thus to fashion their Creator, put their own Stamp or Impress upon him, and shape him to their Fancies. And indeed it is nothing but Fancy that has to do in this Attempt, and accordingly it must vanish as the Operations of that illusive Faculty use to do. We may represent God to ourselves as we please, but that has no more real Influence on him, than a deforming Optick-glass has on the Object it disguises, he is still the same amidst all our wild Conceits of him, and will always make good the Title, by which he delivered himself to *Moses*, *Exod. iii. 14. I am that I am.* All that is in him is equally immense and infinite, his Mercy need not invade his Justice to gain itself a larger Field of Action, which is already (as the Psalmist speaks) *over all his works*; neither his Justice encroach upon his Mercy, that having also a Province wide enough; all impenitent Sinners being within its Verge, and God knows how much soever we straiten it in our Opinions, we do indeed too much extend it in its real Force, by rendering ourselves the proper Objects of it. In short, God, who is the Author of Order and Peace, cannot be supposed to be in Confusion within himself; the divine Attributes are not in Strife, but perfect Harmony; it is we only that have raised this more than gigantick War, not only against Heaven, but in it. The several Luminaries pursue the regular Motions of the Spheres; but we confound at once the Laws of their Creation, and their Author too, strive to eclipse and darken the Father of Light. But if the removing of an earthly Land-mark be a Crime pu-



nishable both by God and Man, what Thunderbolts belong to those who thus attempt to set new Boundaries to Heaven, to limit and measure out even the divine Nature, by the Proportions of their own Fancies ; and indeed such Temerity as this, is too like to confute itself, and feel that Justice it will not believe ; yet as great and daring a Crime as it is, I fear there are few that can totally acquit themselves of it : For though all disavow it, yet he that shall narrowly search his own Heart, will scarce find it clear from all Degrees of it. We are all apt to cherish a flattering Hope, that God is not so severe as he is represented, or that if, in respect of his Justice, he be a consuming Power, yet that Mercy will be sure to snatch us out of the Burning, like the Angels to Lot, assist our Escapes, and provide us a *Zoar, that our souls may live ;* and this Hope, though founded only in our Wishes, is very apt to slide into our Faith, and make us believe what we would have ; by which Means this becomes a kind of epidemick Heresy, the most frequent and common Misperuasion that occurs concerning the divine Attributes.

*Which hath given occasion to several dangerous Errors in Religion, and particularly about the Nature and Duration of Hell Torments ;*

9. It would be a Work more long than useful to recite the several Errors that have sprung from this one : That of *Origen*, that the Devils should finally be saved, is a noted and pregnant Instance, which could be derived from nothing but this unequal Apprehension of God's Justice and Mercy : And besides all other ancient, we have many Branches of a later Growth, that spring from the same Root, a set of plausible Fallities, which would quench the unquenchable Fire, and kill the never-dying worm ; I mean

mean those allaying softening Descriptions some of this Age have made of Hell, some changing the Kind, others abating the Intensity, or at least the Duration of those Torments, each subtracting so much from this *Tophet*, that they have left Atheism an easy Talk to take away the rest; and may give Suspicion they mean to visit that Place, which they are so industrious to make easy.

10. But whatever they do themselves, it is sure this is the Way to send others thither, to take off their Fears of it, to make them think it not so dreadful a Place as they once supposed, and consequently less careful to decline the Ways that lead to it. It is indeed too obvious, that such Persuasions do mightily impugn Christian Practice, and embolden Men in Sin; and God knows we need no such Encouragement; the more general fallacious Hopes of Mercy being too sufficient for that Purpose, without these supernumerary Deceits: But between the one and the other, Libertinism is like to out-grow all Restraints, and the Opinion of God's Goodness, instead of *leading men to repentance*, will slacken those Reins wherewith our brutish Nature should be bridled and restrained, and we thus left unto the Sway of Lust and Passion, must run head-long upon Ruin, *as the horse rusheth into the battle*. For, alas, we are not so generous as to do well for Virtue's sake, nay, nor so provident as to do it for Reward; it is our Fear that is the most prevalent Incentive, and accordingly we find Religion generally makes her first Impressions there. They are *the terrors of the Lord* that do most usually, and most effectually *persuade men*, 2. Cor. v. 11. our Hearts must be pricked, and at those Orifices Piety enters. Now, when all these Terrors shall be superseded

*which is apt to  
abate the Fear  
and Terror  
thereof in the  
Minds of bad  
Men,*

perfed by the Opinion of an overwhelming Mercy, when Hell fhall either be annihilated, or fupposed fo to annihilate us, that we fhall lofe our Paffivenefs with our Being, and be as uncapable of fuffering, as even Heaven itfelf can make us, what will be left to engage us to Virtue, or deter us from Vice? Alas, do we not often fee a daring Luft bid Battle to all the Artillery of Heaven, meet God in his loudeft Thunder, and venture on Damnation in its dreadfulft Form? And can we think it will be more modeft, when it fhall be told that they are only edgelefs Weapons it hath to encounter? That God's Thunder, amidft all its Noife, carries no Bolt? And that the Flames of the bottomlefs Pit are but a painted Fire, that at a Distance may fright, but not hurt us, or at leaft fo hurt us, that we fhall not feel it? When thofe Rubs which Fear interpoled are thus removed, there is nothing to ftay the Courfe of headlong Riot, but precipitiously it will on, wherever ftrong Defire fhall drive, or flattering Luft allure: He that loved his Sin, even when it threatened him Ruin, ferved it affiduoufly, when it promifed no other Wages than Death, *Rom. vi. 23.* how will he hug this Viper when he thinks it is ftinglefs, and give up his Ear to be bored by that Matter, which affords him prefent Pleafures without future Stripes? We fee even in civil Matters the Prefumption of Impunity is the great Nurfe of Disorders, and if it were not for the coercive Power of Laws we fhould foon fee how little the directive would fignify; and, doubtlefs, it is the fame in fpiritual, or rather worfe, by how much we are more bent upon the breaking of God's Laws than Mens, and confequently will be the more apprehenfive of any Encouragement.

11. Of the Truth hereof our Experience gives too sad Proof, none rushing so boldly upon God's Justice, as those who have most fortified themselves against the Dread of it, as if they meant their Practice should experiment the Truth of their Speculation, and make the utmost Trial whether God can be provoked or no. Indeed Men use Mercy as amazed Passengers sometimes do a Plank in a Shipwreck, lay so much Weight upon it, as sinks both it and themselves; so perishing by too great a Confidence of their Rescue, and finding a Gulph where they expected an Ark: Not that I suppose Mercy unable to support the Weight of all the Persons, nay, and of all the Sins in the World, which have not the one ponderous Adherent of Impenitence superadded; but that is a Burden which even the divine Clemency sinks under, refuses to plead such a Cause, and refers it to Justice as its proper Court: And therefore to sin on, in Hope of Mercy, is to undermine ourselves, and commit a Folly as absurd as ruinous; I wish I could say it were not also as frequent: But God knows it is every where too apparent; Men openly avow it, so that it is become the vulgar Answer to every convicting Reproof, that God is merciful: And surely they that observe the Growth of Vice, since our new Descriptions of Hell came abroad, will have Cause to think the one has had no small Influence on the other, and that while some have made it borrow the Uneasiness of our human State to make up its Torments; they have taken care it should be just, and lend us back Sins of a greater Magnitude. This miserable Traffick have these Factors settled, between the present World and the infernal Region, that Hell shall have Earth's Pains, and Earth Hell's Wickedness;



Wickedness; the latter, alas, we are too fully possessed of, which is like to send too many Souls to discover the Deceit of the other. In fine, our groundless Confidences of Mercy, and those other Chimæras we forge out of that, are certainly the most frequent and dangerous Underminers of Christian Practice; these, like the Sun, give Heat and Vigour to those inordinate Lusts which a just Fear of Vengeance would, as a Winter's Frost, nip and destroy: And till we lay by these easy slight Thoughts of God, and consider him in those more awful Attributes which exact our Reverence, his Mercy will only serve to ripen us for his Judgment; that smooth and gentle Property in God, which, to all who abuse it not, is indeed the *oil of gladness*, will, thus perverted, acquire the more fatal Quality of Oil, serve only to intend our Flames, and remove us as far from the Rewards of Piety, as our bold Fancies have done from the Practice.

12. A third Sort of Mistakes there are by which Piety is obstructed, and those are such as concern God's Providence, about which the World has long since had many Disputes; some entirely denying it, as presuming God so wholly taken up with the Contemplation and Enjoyment of his own Felicity, that he is utterly inconsiderate of that of his Creatures, and an unconcerned Spectator of human Affairs; others limiting and restraining it to those Things only which themselves were pleased to think worthy of the divine Inspection and Conduct: But these Questions have been more bandied among Philosophers than Christians, and therefore are beyond our present Enquiry. Yet give me leave, by the Way, to express my Fears, that these Errors have yet some secret Root-  
ing.

ing in too many Hearts ; that there are many who rather formally say, than cordially believe, that God governs the World, and disposes as well of human as divine Things ; a Suspicion that is rendered too probable by those indirect Arts Men use, to possess themselves of secular Advantages ; for did they seriously think, that all those Things are in God's Hands, from whence they are neither strong nor cunning enough, either to wrest or pilfer them, it is scarce imaginable they should attempt such painful Impossibilities, disquiet themselves in vain, as the Psalmist speaks, and, which is worse, forfeit all Title to them as God's Gifts, by thus assuming to make them their own. But this is a Disquisition I must leave every Man to make in his own Heart ; only let me say, that he that has there any Doubt of God's universal or particular Providence, has also in it the Root of all unchristian Sins, of Distrust, Solitude and Fraud ; there being nothing that can effectually supersede our own Carkings and Contrivances for ourselves, but the Assurance that God cares for us ; Men being still apt to scramble, where there is none from whom they expect an orderly and sufficient Distribution, and therefore this Error, wherever it is found, may well be reckoned among the Impeders of Christian Duty.

13. But besides those who thus doubt of Providence, there are others liable to great Mistakes, I mean those who, to their just Belief of God's Providence, superadd a groundless Confidence of their own Skill in fathoming it ; that are not content to know it in its Product and Event, but pretend to discern it in its most secret Designments and Purposes, and do not so much reverse God's Dispensations as interpret them. I do not here mean to condemn all particu-  
lar

2. *in such as go about to fathom the Depths of it ;*

lar Applications of providential Events, which are sometimes so extraordinary and remarkable, that they are their own Expositors, and point out the Construction we are to make; and an humble Advertence unto such, is not only innocent but necessary: But when Men shall attempt to read every Line in God's Hand, to make their own Inference from every Efflux of Providence: these Pretenders to divine Palmistry, seem to differ only thus much from those who make a Trade of the natural, that they cheat themselves as well as others.

14. Yet there want not some who  
 3. *in others* have gone yet farther, and think not  
*that would* only to understand Providence, but  
*have a Hand* assist it; not only trace it in all its  
*in the Execu-* intricate Windings, and concealed  
*tion of it.* Intendments, but help it in the Execution, and give Birth to its Con-

ceptions: Of this Sort especially are those, who having possessed their Brains with some conjectural Expositions of obscure Prophecies, will administer to Providence, and call out those Events they expect; and as if they were conscious that God would not make good their Dreams, endeavour to do it themselves. This Age has afforded too many Instances of this, when the fulfilling of Prophecies has, by some, been made the solemn Summons to Rebellion and Blood; and in order to the *hating and destroying of the whore*, *Rev. xvii. 1.* Men have been animated to hate and destroy all who were not infected with their own Frenzy. This we know has been called the *helping of the Lord against the mighty*, and something more than votive Curses awarded to those who refused to assist. Thus have they first wildly mistaken, and then no less wildly out-run God's Designs; as if, like *Baal*, *Judges vi.* he were unable to plead for himself, to vindicate his own Cause,

Cause, or effect his Purposes without their Help ; and having resolved what he shall do, obtrude themselves upon him as his Instruments : How repugnant such Anticipations of Providence are to the Interests of Christianity, is too apparent from the many detestable Effects they have produced.

15. But setting aside these, let us return to those we spake of before ; who, presuming to expound providential Events, make them the Criterion by which to judge both of Persons and of Causes, concluding the one loved or hated, the other approved or disallowed by God, according to their prosperous or adverse Success.

The first of these was by our Saviour exploded, as an undue Way of Process in the Jews, in the Case of the *Galileans*, and before him *Solomon* had given it as a Maxim, that *no man could know love or hatred by all that is before him*, Eccl. ix. 1. And if, under the Jewish Oeconomy, where temporal Blessings made up so great a Part of their Promises, it was so ; much more is it under the Gospel, whose Frame and Composure is quite distant ; which, instead of proposing secular Prosperities to its Proselytes, assures them the contrary ; sets up the Cross as the Standard under which they are to fight, and affords no temporal Hopes, but with an allaying Proviso of Persecutions and Afflictions ; nay, the Apostle to the *Hebrews* goes farther, makes them not only incident but necessary to Christians, the Badge and Cognizance of Sonship, whilst the no chastening is the fataleſt Sign, a Token of Bastardy and Abdication, Heb. xii. 7, 8. And, doubtless, the Experience of every Christian asserts the Doctrine ; we are all apt, with the Prodigal, to forsake our Father's House, and as long as we can have the Riot



and not the Wants, shall never think of returning; we must be famished into Consideration, and our Husks alone will send us home to the fatted Calf. And can there be a greater Indulgence in God than thus to make our Iniquity our Punishment, that it may not be our Ruin? To embitter those Sensualities whose Lusciousness serves to intoxicate us, and to clip those Wings which he sees carry us from him? Stories tell us, that the *Trojan Wives*, after the Destruction of their Country, being wearied with their restless vagrant Life, necessitated their Husbands to a Settlement by burning their Ships. And the same kind Stratagem God has upon us: He sees that our worldly Accessions do rather enlarge than fill our Appetites, and carry us on to farther Pursuits, and by drawing us still more from him the Center of Rest, expose us to endless Wanderings, and then what can be kinder than to rescue us from such a Condition, that Curse of *Cain*, to be a *fugitive and a vagabond in the earth*? To deprive us of our treacherous Prosperities, and fire those Ships wherein we are preparing, like *Jonah*, to flee from the presence of the Lord; so, by a happy Necessity, forcing us to fix ourselves on him. And this is the worst God designs us in every Adversity; and did we mean but as well to ourselves, we should not miss of receiving the happiest Effects, even that *peaceable fruit of righteousness* the Apostle speaks of, *Heb. xii.* This holy Men so well understood, that we find them dread nothing so much as an uninterrupted Prosperity; they, like the *Muscovite Women*, grew jealous of God's Love when he forbore to strike; upon which Score it is, that in the ancient Fathers, there are so many solemn Petitions for Stripes; such importunate Solicitations for the medicinal Corrections, wherein they judged both God's Kindness and their own Safety to consist.

16. And then how perverse, how preposterous are our Measures, when we conclude quite the other Way, estimate God's Love only from outward Successes, and think he is never angry but when he smites? A Persuasion, which as it is very false in

*We must not judge of his Love by worldly Prosperity;*

its Grounds, so very pernicious in its Effects, and creates Hopes and Fears, as fallacious as itself. For first, if we apply it to ourselves, it produces Mischiefs proportionable to the divers States under which we are. If a Man be full and prosperous, it makes him proud and secure, for when he has not only the Possession of those Things the World values, but takes them as an Attestation of God's peculiar Kindness and Approbation, what should make him either consider or reform his Guilt? If he have Sanctity enough to possess him of God's Favour, and all these profitable Effects of it, he will not easily be persuaded he needs more; and any Man that shall tell him he does, shall be heard with the same Indignation wherewith *Cresus* entertained *Solon*, when he found him question that Happiness, which he expected he should have admired. Prosperity is, in itself, an emboldening Thing, but, when backed by this Opinion of it, grows into all Insolence, till, at last, it even recoil in the face of the Donor, and dare God by all those enormous Riots to which it enables Men.

17. On the other side, this Opinion presents a less merry, but not less dangerous Temptation to those in Adversity; for when they shall look on themselves only as the Anvil for God's Strokes, they will be too apt to compleat the Parallel, by an-

*nor of his Hatred by outward Crosses and Affliction.*

swering it in Hardness and Inflexibility, have the *ἀσπότης* *astotes*, as the Father calls it, which reverberates the Blow on him that gave it. Persevering Wickedness is so naturally the Issue of Desperation, that we find the *Jews* take up the one merely to countenance the other, pretend Hopelessness to avoid Reformation: Thus we find it, *Ezek. xxxiii. 10. Our iniquities are upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we live?* And again more plainly, *Jer. xviii. 12. There is no hope, and then the Inference is ready, Let us walk every one in his own ways.* Endeavour is the Child of Hope, and we attempt not to atone one whom we conclude implacable: So that Wrath may consume, but will never melt us; it is Love only that has that softening, dissolving Power, and unless we discern a Mixture of that in God's Inflictions, they will never render us malleable to his Impressions. We kiss a Father's Hand and Rod, when an Executioner's Stroke we suffer rather than bear. *St. John* tells us, *we love God because he loved us, 1 John iv. 19.* I wish all Men would make good the Inference; but it is sure they are too apt to do it in the reverse, and will hate if they apprehend themselves hated; a State which at once exemplifies, and anticipates the worst Part of Hell to us, yet very incident to those who interpret every Stroke of God's, as the Effect of Enmity and utter Aversion. This is to do that to ourselves which the Devils so deprecate from Christ, to torment us before our time, it being peculiar to the Vengeance of the other World to be merely punitive, that here being rather Discipline than Vengeance, designed to reduce, not destroy us: And, indeed, besides the Pain of Sense which this Error creates, it does (to perfect the Hell) give that of Loss also; deprives us of one of the great Evangelical Felicities, that of *rejoicing in tribulations,* which

which our Saviour thought so considerable, as to insert amongst his Beatitudes; and his Apostles frequently mention it triumphantly as the great Privilege and Prerogative of a Christian. For if all adverse Successes be a Note of God's Disfavour, there will be no place for Joy even in the most pious Sufferings. St. Stephen's ravishing Prospect will be intercepted, and a Martyr's Death be as uncomfortable as a Malefactor's. But if these were the only Sufferings to which Joy were annexed, there would be but too few concerned in the Deprivation; those wherein we are more universally interested, are those Chastisements of God which our Guilt's provoke; which, tho', in respect of their Cause, they are Matters of the greatest Sadness, yet, in regard of their Significancy and Effect, they are Grounds of Comfort; they signify that God (however displeased) yet has not abandoned the Care of us; thinks us worth his Correction, and designs our Reducement: And the Effect will (if not obstructed by us) be answerable to that Design: Our Chastening here rescues us from the Sins, and consequently the condemnation of the world, 1 Cor. xi. 32. and this is sure no slight Motive of Rejoicing; and we are very unjust to God and ourselves, if we will exchange it for the sullen Murmurs of a desperate Incurable.

18. And as this Persuasion is thus pernicious in Reflexion on ourselves, *Not to envy* so neither is it more innocent when *any Man* for applied to others; for, first, if we *his prospe-* look on the Men that prosper in the *rous Estate;* World, as the Psalmist speaks, *Psal.*

lxxiii. 12. we shall too often find them answer the Character he gives them in the former Part of the Psalm, and when, from their temporal Affluence, we shall conclude God's Favour to them, it will be hard resisting the Temptation, which (without that



Argument) the Psalmist was under, of thinking it vain to cleanse our hearts, or wash our hands in innocency. Nay, we shall be apt to join our Suffrage to those in *Malachi* iii. 15. and call the proud, happy: And if we esteem them so, it is natural to desire to be like them; so we shall quickly grow to despise a poor or afflicted Innocence, and embrace all thriving prosperous Sins.

19. On the other side, if we look nor misjudge on others in an adverse calamitous him for any State, this Opinion suggests hard and Trouble or severe Sentences concerning them, Calamity that inclines us to judge where we should may befall succour, and how great an Accumulation of Misery that is, we may him here. learn from *Job*, whom we find not so often nor so passionately complaining of any of his Pressures, as of the unkind Censures of his Friends, who weighing in this deceitful Balance of temporal Successes, made very false Judgments of him, and as if they were to glean after Satan, endeavoured to despoil him of that only Comfort his Malice had left, the Conscience of his Innocency. This is, as the Psalmist speaks, *to persecute him whom God has smitten, and to talk to the grief of those whom he hath wounded*; a Thing repugnant to the common Temper of Humanity, and much more to that Tenderness, those Affections and Bowels Christianity requires; and therefore, in this respect also, we may reckon this Persuasion very injurious to Christian Duty.

20. Nor is it less so when We must govern our Actions by God's Laws, and not his Providence. applied to Causes, in which it is full as deceitful a Rule as it is in Persons: God has designed us another Measure of our Undertakings; his Word and

and Law, by the general Proportions whereof, we are to square and accommodate our particular Actions: He sends us not to his Providence, and the various Distributions of that; or allows us to judge of the Justice, by the Success of our Attempts. If that were the Trial, it were impossible for any Enterprize to be lawful, since that which should legitimate it, is subsequent to it, and can have no Influence on it, to the making it good or bad; and as it does not make, so neither does it infallibly signify it to be either; and of those who presume it does, I should ask: whence it came to do so? If by any Assignment of God, let them produce it; and if not thence, I'm sure it can make no Pretence to Certainty, God having no where obliged his Providence to make good our Fancies and Conjectures. Nay, if we look into Scripture-examples, we shall find this irrefragably confuted, the same Cause having, at several Times, differing Success. Thus the *Israelites* were discomfited at their first Assault upon *Ai*, and yet successful after; it was something extrinick to the Cause that made the Variation, that still continuing the same. The like we find in the Case of the *Benjamites*, who, though in as ill an Engagement as can well be imagined, had yet two Victories over the other Tribes, *Judges xx*. But there is one Instance that may serve for all, and that is the taking of the Ark by the *Philistines*: He that shall contemplate that, will sure never think fit to measure Causes by Success, unless he will give the Deference also to *Dagon*, who then triumphed in the Spoils of the God of *Israel*. In short, it is evident, Victories are not so entailed upon the justest Causes, but that they may be, and often are, cut off, either by the Guilts of the Undertakers, or by some other secret Disposal of the Divine Wisdom; but the former is so frequently the obvious Cause of it,

it, that we are not often put to resort to the latter. It is no strange thing to see all *Israel* troubled by an *Achan*, or have the Ark taken Captive from off the Shoulders of a *Hophni* and *Phinehas*, nor will it ever be possible for the best Cause to secure itself from the blasting Influence of its Abettors Crimes.

21. This is so clear and evident a Truth, that it is Matter of some Wonder, how the contrary Persuasion should ever insinuate itself; and indeed it is not probable it ever had, if Interest, that grand Sophister, had not introduced it.

Men engage in Designs not on Intuition of their Lawfulness, but Profit; and when they are such as nothing can warrant *a priori*, their only Reserve is to make them good *a posteriore*, to bring a Licence after the Fact, and justify their Beginning by their End; which, how ridiculous soever it may seem to sober Reason, yet such is the natural Shame, or secular Inconvenience of owning an unjust Act, that Men will wrap themselves, though in the thinnest and most diaphanous Veils, make use of the absurdest Pretences, and faintest Colours to shadow their Guilt, and whilst Conscience bids them say somewhat for themselves, and the Case affords no solid Plea, they are driven to these deplorable Slights and Subterfuges. Indeed this is an Argument that stands single, and is seldom used but in those Causes that admit of no better; which we may reasonably conclude to be the Reason why it was so much insisted on by our late Disturbers, who, in such Abundance of Light, as they owned, could not be supposed ignorant enough to believe themselves: It was certainly the Destitution of better Arguments that cast them upon this, forced them to ransack the Alcoran, and rifle a Piece of *Turkish* Divinity

Divinity to make good their Saintship. They now discern the Unskillfulness of that Plea, which a little Time has converted to an Accusation. The great Change it has pleased God to make among us, retorting their conquering Syllogisms, and making them need a new Success to justify their Vaunts of the old. God grant we may not here relieve them again, and, by our personal Sins, help them to that which the Justice of their Cause never did, nor is like to acquire them.

22. But though this Plea of Success be frequently urged in Policy, yet it prevails with many who know not that it is so; indeed the Vulgar are so much subjected to their Senses, that generally the Conclusions drawn from thence are easily embraced, when those from Reason and Conscience have a double Difficulty, first to be understood, and next to be admitted; and the most elaborate Discourse shall not convince them of the Right of that Cause, which, in the last Appeal to God's Tribunal by War, has been openly condemned, whilst the Spoils of Victory as much satisfy the Understanding, of the Justice of the Prize, as the Desire, with the Wealth or Glory of it. And this is it which renders such kind of arguings very pernicious, they being so fitted to the common Temper, that they seldom miss to be effectual; and engage the heady Multitude in the Prosecution of the worst Designs, that are recommended to them by the one Catholick Virtue of Success. This is, indeed, as the Prophet speaks, *Ezekiel xiii. 22. to strengthen the hands of evil doers, that they turn not from their wickedness*; to dazle their Eyes so with the Splendor of prosperous Iniquity, that they can never come to take an exact View, and discern it in its

*Another Mistake of Providence, to judge of the Goodness of any Cause by its Success;*



its true Form: And, doubtless, this was none of the least-prevailing Arts of Seducement among us, and drew in many to abet those seditious Practices, which all Laws of God and Man prohibited, and whereby Christian Religion has at once been violated and defamed; has not only her Precepts broken, but herself aspersed with the foul Consequences of that Disobedience, and so buys one Injury with another; the Contempt of her Authority with the Loss of her Reputation.

23. We have now seen the ill *yet God intends our Good by all his providential Dispensations.* Consequences issuing from these Mistakes of God's Providence, but we must take Notice, that there remains yet as great or greater

Danger on the other Side, and that a total Neglect is worse than an erroneous Construction of it. For though God have secluded us from that more exact minute discerning of his Purposes, yet he means not his Dispensations should be looked on as wholly insignificant, and therefore has given us a general Scope and Meaning of them, according to which we are to limit and restrain our wandering Guesses and also judge of particular Events. Now, as God's original and primary Design in the Creation of Man, was to render him a Subject capable of eternal Happiness, so also have all his subsequent Acts toward him aimed at the same End: And because there is nothing removes Man so far from that grand Purpose of his Being, as ~~sin~~; therefore God has made the suppressing of that the universal Intendment of his Disposals concerning us: So that the most different Dispensations do severally pursue that one End; Prosperity and Adversity in their successive Changes are sent to reclaim us from the *error of our ways*, with this only Difference, that the one leads, the other drives.

This

This is asserted by *St. Paul*, who tells us, that *the goodness and long-suffering of God is to lead us to repentance, Rom. ii. 4.* And also, that when we are judged, *we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world, 1 Cor. xi. 32.* And indeed the whole Scripture runs in the same Strain; and both from prosperous and adverse Successes, urges the Obligation to Obedience. This is the Notice God expects we should take of all his Dealings towards us. And the Want thereof we find often sharply upbraided by God to the *Jews*; how often does he recount his redeeming them from *Egypt*, his instating them in *Canaan*, and all his wonderful Works for them, with an accusing Reflexion upon their Ingratitude; and that we may know his Judgments are no less to be accounted for than his Mercies, we find him, *Amos iv.* making a Catalogue of them, and closing every Period with this pathetick Reproof of their Obstinacy, *Yet have ye not returned to me, saith the Lord.* In short, God requires that we should observe every Turn of his Hand, in order to the reforming our own Lives, and by the several Mediums of Gratitude or Fear, infer that necessary Conclusion of a sincere universal Obedience; and the Neglect of this is the Crime the Psalmist mentions, *Psalms xxviii. 5.* with so severe a Menace, *They regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands.*

24. And as this is required from single Persons, so also from Societies and Communities, which, as they are in their publick Capacities the most eminent Subjects of Judgments or Mercies, so are they the most eminently accountable for both. And though the Neglect and Abuse of God's Methods be a very provoking

*National Reformation is designed by national Mercies and Judgments.*

Guilt,

Guilt, when it is only personal, yet is it much more so, when it becomes national ; and therefore, as it is every Man's Concern, for his own Peculiar, to examine how he has answered God's Methods towards him, so is it an Enquiry very pertinent in relation to the Publick also ; especially where the Dispensations have been remarkable and extraordinary ; in which Respect the Inquisition cannot appear more necessary for any than this Nation ; upon which Consideration, I hope the Reader will think it no unpardonable Digression, if we a-while turn aside after it.

*God expects our Returns should be answerable to what we receive.*

25. It is the Affirmation of our blessed Saviour, that *where much is given, there shall be much required* ; a Thing so consonant with natural Equity, that we all give our Suffrage to it, by making it the Measure of our Expectations in secular Things, wherein every Man looks for Returns proportionable to his Expence or Industry. The Husbandman expects a Crop answerable to his Seed and Labour ; and in the nobler Cultures of the Mind, we justly exact of our Pupils to let their Manners attest the Discipline they have been under : According to which Estimate we must resolve, that God's Expectations from us, of this Nation, cannot but be very high, there being no People under the Sun, whom he has more signalized as his own immediate Care, on whom the divine Oeconomy has more constantly and even solicitously attended in all the Variety of seasonable and powerful Applications.

26. I shall not assume the Work of a Chronicle, by giving a Series of all those Mercies we received in the Loins of our Ancestors ; and of which we have

*This Nation hath been blessed with many Mercies, which we have abused and forgot ;*

have provided one unhappy Memorial, I mean our nauseating and despising them ; it having been the Business of our Days to disentail those two most inestimable Blessings of a pure Religion and outward Peace, which our immediate Progenitors left us, and to derive to our Posterity the contrary Mischiefs of Impiety and Confusion.

27. But not to revel so far back, I shall confine my reflexions to so late a Date, that I shall not need to bespeak the Faith afforded to Historians ; scarce any that can be my Reader, but is qualified to be my Witness too ; and must acknowledge that there has, on God's Part, been no Method wanting, that might purify us to himself *a peculiar people zealous of good works.* To that End of refining and cleansing us it was, that he kept us so long in the Furnace, permitted us to those many fiery Trials of our late calamitous Days. It were impertinent here to give a Description of those Sufferings, which every Man's Memory can so readily represent to him ; or to paint that Flame whose Scorchings we have felt ; it is enough to say, that God appeared in them, earnestly industrious to have reduced us, like a skilful Captain, besieged us closely, straitened us so in all our Interests, that it was scarce possible for us to fly any where but to himself. Indeed he that would make up an exact Catalogue of our Calamities, must calculate in how many Instances human Nature may be passive ; there being scarce any of our suffering Capacities, to which they were not liberally apportioned, our Estates, our Persons, our Friends, and which is more than all, our Consciences, all groaning under the Weight of that Yoke, which our own Sins prepared, and other Mens Sins put on. Which Way

*and been exercised lately with Variety of Judgments and Calamities ;*



soever we looked, we saw nothing but that which might consume our Eyes and grieve our Heart ; if on the Church, we saw that torn by Schism, spoiled by Sacrilege ; the Abomination of Desolation standing in the Holy Place, and the *house of prayer* made, in the most literal sense, a *den of thieves* : If on the State, we saw the Breath of our Nostrils, the *anointed of the Lord*, taken in their Pits, imprisoned, and arraigned, and barbarously murdered, by those who slew him, like the Heir in the Gospel, that they might seize on his Inheritance. We saw this, and all other Mischiefs, established by a Law, and made as irreverfible as powerful Malice could render them. And now, in fuch a Distrefs, who would not think that fuch a Neceffity fhould have become our Virtue ? and fo perfect a Deftitution compelled our Refort to the Divine Aid ? And as little oppreffed States ufed to make themfelves Homagers to the *Romans*, to engage their Protection ; fo we fhould have made an entire Surrendry of ourfelves to God, that we might have gained a Title to his Refcues and Deliverances.

28. This genuine and kindly Effect I doubt not but it had in fome, I would fain think in many ; but we are not now confidering Particulars, but the Community ; and therefore how fincere fsoever fuch personal Reformations were, they muft not come under the Account of publick

*which yet have had no Effect toward our Repentance and Humiliation ;*

and general, unlefs, for their Number and Eminency, they had been fufficient to have overwhelmed the contrary Perverfenefs : Many there might be whose Hearts (as it is faid of *Jofiah's*, 2 *Chron.* xxxiv. 27.) did melt, and yet the far greater Number of the obdurate, ftill juftly denominate us a *ftiff-necked people* ; an Epithet wherewith God often

ten reproaches the *Jews*, and sure we have no less evidenced our Title to it: For, alas, as if we had meant to revenge the Inexorableness of our Oppressors towards us, in our Obstinacy to God, as if, when we could keep nothing else, we had yet reserved this sullen Comfort, of having our Hearts impregnable, we made a Shift to hold out against all these Batteries; there was little Appearance, and less Reality of Repentance; and if some of our Lusts were at all less raging, it was only because they were starved into a little Tameness, the Supplies cut off which should maintain our Riot: But when any Recruits could be had, they were devoted that Way, and even in the worst of Times, we missed not to be as luxurious as we were able: And as though we resolved that Vice, like the Sea, should gain in one Part what it lost in another, we took Order that what was thus inevitably defalked from those expensive Sins, should be made up in the cheaper: We could curse, and swear and blaspheme in spite of Sequestration, and this wretched Immunity we made abundant Use of, till we even became proverbial for it; and gave our Enemies Pretext to fasten it on us as our distinctive Character. Yet to shew ourselves generous Sinners, there was one Vice we bought at a dear Rate, I mean our as imprudent, as unchristian Animosities, and Piques among ourselves, a Sin that helped to revenge all the rest; and was as well upon a human as divine Account, a grand Instrument of our Ruin. To these we may add our impatient Murmurs at our Sufferings, which did in some work so preposterously, as to reconcile them to the Inflicters, made them unworthily desert that Cause, they found chargeable to maintain, and contrary to the Advice of *Solomon*, choose the Ways of those Oppressors whose Prosperity they envied, *Prov. iii.* But of these real Apo-

states, the Number, I hope, was not great, I wish I could say so also of those seeming Deserters, whose Knees bowed to *Baal*, tho' their Hearts did not; who belied their own Loyalty, and in a Shew of Compliance prostituted Conscience in several Engagements as inconsistent with each other, as they all were with Duty, and such as they pretend no Excuse for their taking, but their Resolutions of breaking. It was indeed a sad Spectacle to see what Shoals every menacing Edict brought in; while Men ran in as much Haste to take the Opportunity of Perjury, as the Primitive Christians were wont to do of Martyrdom: Indeed herein we seemed to invade our Enemies Peculiar, would not suffer them to enjoy those Marks of Distinction they had framed to themselves; so that, as far as Oaths could signify, we were all one Party. And yet, while we thus disclaimed God's Reliefs by these indirect Attempts of our own, we took it very ill that he left us to the Success of them; that he prospered not those Methods he had interdicted, and made us triumphant, not only over our Enemies but himself too: And upon this Score many mutinous Blasphemies were uttered, and perhaps some more thought, though, I confess, generally we were not so modest as to stick at saying the worst we could think; and, indeed, they that heard the frequent Doubts Men owned of God's Justice, Providence, nay his very Being, would not think they suppressed any thing as too ill to be spoken: We laid boundless Expectations upon the Justice of our Cause, and as if we had extremely obliged God by not being Traitors or Schismatics, thought he wronged us extremely that he made us not Victors. *Samuel* tells *Saul*, that *rebellion is like witchcraft*; but we seemed to think Loyalty was so; that, like a Spell, it was to keep us invulnerable, not only against our

Enemies

Enemies but ourselves; and so countercharm all our Crimes that they should only be active to please not hurt us. But if, in the last place, we reflect on ourselves even in relation to that Cause in which we so much confided, it is to be feared all Men will not be able to evince they suffered for God and the King, tho' they did it in their Quarrel: It is the Intent must denominate whose Martyrs they were, it being too frequent for private Passions and Interests to march under the Banner of Conscience; and we call that sometimes taking up the Cross, which is only the taking up an Animosity or Humour. Indeed it is not possible for any to be God's Martyr, who is not first his Servant; none of us will suffer the greatest Things for a Person for whom we will not do the least; and it is absurd Hypocrisy for a Man to pretend he has left all for God, who, we see, cannot be wooed to leave the most despicable Lust for him. He that will not part with the Noise of a loud Oath, the Pleasure of an intemperate Cup, the Applause of a profane Jest for God, will surely much less expose his Liberty, his Estate, his Life, for him; and therefore what Hazards soever any Man ran in any of those, he can with no Justice set it upon God's Account, unless he can produce such other Acts of Obedience, as may witness this to be true and genuine. And upon this Trial, I fear God's Party will appear to have been but small among us, and perhaps the King's not much greater, it being not very probable that those should have any great Sense of Duty to him that had none to God; or that those should religiously revere one Commandment, who despised the other nine. But we need not the Help of Inference and Probability in this Matter, the mutinous and insolent Behaviour of many who professed Loyalty, did too clearly evince it: And as it is said of *Joab*, that he turn-



ed after *Atonijah*, though he turned not after *Ab-salom*, *1 Kings* ii. 28. and some of ours had little private Rebellions of their own, even while they opposed the more publick. I love not to pass Censures on Mens Thoughts, yet I doubt some would be too conscious to confute me, if I should say there wanted not those, who owed their Zeal to their Spleen, and did not so much love those they fought for, as hated those they fought against. And it may perhaps deserve Enquiry, whether that demure Pretence of Holiness their Adversaries had put on, did not more avert some of our Libertines from them, than all their real Crimes: They, perhaps, so far mistook them, as to suspect they might be in earnest, when they professed to advance the *power of godliness*, and at that took an Alarm, and such Men (if such there were) contended not for the Liberty of their Country, but their Lusts; and could, with no Justice, expect either a Reputation, or Success, from that Cause which they, at once, helped to defame and defeat. I am loth to go farther, and suspect that even some of the devouter Sort were inspired more by the Spirit of Opposition than Piety; yet, I confess, it is hard to resist that Surmise, when it is considered that our Liturgy never had its due Veneration, but when the Directory was set up against it. Indeed, he that shall remember how our private Oratories were then thronged and crowded, and shall now compare it with our empty Churches, will be tempted to think our Devotion was of that Sort, which is excited by Interdict, and deadened by Invitations; a perverse Kind of Zeal, kindled only by Antiperistasis or Collision; none of that pure Flame which descends from Heaven. And then, as our Saviour, in another Case, says, *If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?* *Matth.* vi. If  
this

this fairer and more specious Part of us were thus reproveable, how obnoxious were the other? And if our Earnestness in a righteous Cause, by its sinister Motives or Adherencies, be unable to justify itself, how shall it bear that heavier Task we laid on it, and plead for our other Guilt.

29. This is the true, though not full Account of our Behaviour under God's Discipline; thus did we fructify upon his pruning us, brought forth indeed nothing but degenerate Fruit. The holy Writ leaves it as a Brand of most inveterate Impiety upon *Ahaz*, that, *in the time of his distress he sinned yet more against the Lord*, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. and sure we have too just Title to the same Character of Infamy; those Sufferings which were sent to chastise our Sins, served but to increase them, and like the *Israelites* in the Brick-kilns, they multiplied the more for their Oppression; we debauched even our Executioners, and made every new Calamity supply us with some new Vice; and now when God's Rod was thus despised, we were, in all reason, to expect he should draw his Sword, revenge our Resistance of his Methods, by somewhat we should not resist, make our Plagues as obstinate as ourselves, and involve us in hopeless inevitable Ruin, *This certain fearful looking for of judgment*, Heb. x. 27. was all we had left ourselves, of all the rich Patrimony we were once possessed of, and our present Misery seemed impossible to expire any way but by dying into greater.

30. But as great Artificers are used to magnify their Art, *Yet God's Mercy* by choosing the most unlikely *hath wonderfully* Materials, so did it please God, *appeared in our* in this total Indisposedness of *Deliverance,* ours, when we were so unapt.

Subjects

Subjects to illustrate his Mercy, and as if he designed this national Deliverance should (in its Proportion) be the Transcript of our more universal Redemption, he visited us not only in this State of Misery, but Enmity; when we had set ourselves in Defiance of his Judgments, he laid, as it were, an Ambush of Mercy for us, and surprized us with Safety: By such undiscernible Ways *returned the captivity of our Sion, that we were, indeed, delivered like them that dream, Psal. cxxvi. 1. gave us a Victory without a War; without the Intervention of garments rolled in blood, Isaiah ix. 5. invested us in our triumphant Robes, and, in a word, made us insensibly to glide into our long forgotten Prosperity.*

31. And now who can imagine, which ought to have obliged us to a suitable Change and Amendment: but this miraculous Mutation without us, must also work a Change within us? Indeed, they must have a very ill Opinion of human Nature, that can think it possible it should have Perverse-

ness enough to resist such Endearments; such kindly Heat must needs be supposed to melt us; and if, before our Pride disdained to be compelled, yet even that stubbornest Part of us cannot object against the being courted into Amendment. So that when God has thus yielded to our Terms, left us not so much as a Punctilio in our Way to Piety, it is but a reasonable Expectation we should embrace it with as great an Earnestness, as it was formerly rejected by us.

32. And would God we could say we did so; but, alas, we still affect Prodigies, take a kind of wanton Joy in defeating God's Desigus, and

as if we aspired to vie Miracles with him, have made

made our Returns as unparalleled as his Mercies ; so that the Sum of our Account is this : No Nation was ever more signalized by God's Goodness, or its own Perverseness, it being hard to determine in which of those Respects it is most eminent. That this is, in the general, perfectly true, there are too many Particulars ready to testify, indeed a whole Cloud of Witnesses do concur to the proving the Charge. I shall not undertake to examine all, yet some of the principal it will not be amiss to take notice of.

33. Before we enquire into the Use we have made of God's Mercies, let us a little consider what our Sense of them is ; and sure of all the Interrogatories we can put to ourselves, this appears the easiest, the most gentle, favourable Test, that even our own Partialities could elect for us, it being so natural to Men in Misery to value a Rescue, and celebrate their Deliverers, that the contrary would be the only Wonder ; we see even the Jews, who were none of the most malleable People, yet Deliverances made Impressions on them, set them to their devout Processions and solemn Hymns in praise of God : Nay, such a piece of native Religion is this, that the Heathens exemplify it to us. The *Philistines*, when they had taken *Samson*, magnified their *Dagon*, as having delivered their enemy and the destroyer of their country into their hands, *Judges xvi. 24.* so, upon the Victory over *Saul*, *1 Sam. xxxi. 9.* they sent round about to publish it in the house of their idols. And, in all Stories, we find the Heathen Altars were never so loaden with Sacrifices, as upon such Occasions : And the Gospel tells us, that those on whom Christ bestowed miraculous Cures, were so transported with them, that their

*and almost lost  
the Sense of our  
late miraculous  
Deliverance,*



their Gratitude supplanted their Obedience, and made them, notwithstanding his Prohibition, proclaim the Wonders he had done for them: But I fear, if we reflect upon ourselves, we shall not be able to match any of these Instances. It is true our late Change was entertained with a Joy profuse enough, but not enough religious. We saw that great Things were done for us, and thereof we rejoiced; but we did not so much consider that the Lord had done them, *Psal. cxxiv.* and so were rather affected with the Rarity and Profitableness, than the Mercy and Kindness of the Dispensation: And though the Care of our Governors have provided for the religious Part also, assigned Days of Purim for the perpetual Commemoration of our Deliverance, yet our slight Observance of them does too fully evince our Joy was merely secular; and surely he that observed the numerous and loud Acclamations in the Streets, and the few faint Hallelujahs in the Temple, must needs say they were very disproportionate, and that how much soever the most of us rejoiced, it was not in the Lord: And then we are not to wonder that it was so transient, since it was merely earthly, it must needs partake of the Fadingness of its Original; whereas, had we derived it higher, it would have been lasting and durable, it could not so suddenly have expired, had we fetched it from him, *in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for ever more.* But, alas, our Transports were such as exhausted themselves in their own Noise, we expressed our Joy in Bonfires, and it vapoured away in the Smoke; there wanted that Mixture of Piety which should have fixed that volatile Passion, and we who at first were much more glad than thankful, within a very short Time ceased to be either.

34. And then, as violent Heats, when once expired, are succeeded by the extremest Cold, so has it fared with us; we fell from our Extacies not to the Mean, but the contrary Extreme; our vast Complacencies at their Parting, carried with them even ordinary Contentation, and left us not only joyless, but impatient. It was indeed Matter of equal Shame and Wonder, to see a Scene so suddenly changed, wherein, as in many other Instances, we seemed to have transcribed the Copy of the mutinous *Israelites*, whom we find, in the very same Chapter, *Exod. xv.* triumphing and repining; and no sooner were the Timbrels out of their Hands, but Complaints were in their Mouths, Verse 24. *What shall we drink?* And in the Beginning of the next, with the same querulous Importunity they require Meat. But not to wrong them in the Comparison, their Murmurs had some extenuating Circumstances which ours have not; they looked indeed with some Appetite upon *Ægypt*, and made some Proposals of Return, but it was while they suffered the Hardships of the Wilderness; they preferred a repleted Slavery before a hungry Freedom; but even they were not so frantick in their Mutinies as to make any such Offer in *Canaan*, or have any Emulation to the Garlick and Onions, amidst the Affluence of Milk and Honey: No, it is we alone that have the unhappy Skill of reconciling the Sins of *Canaan* and the Wilderness, murmur as much under our Vines and Fig-trees, as at *Rephidim* or *Marah*, and make all the Outcries of Want and Slavery, whilst we wallow in the utmost Luxury of Plenty and Freedom. I need not here specify the Particulars of our Murmurings, this Discourse being not likely to find many whose Innocence will need

need that Information, this malignant Humour having spread so, that it is now become almost a scandalous (because a singular) thing to be contented. And certainly a considering Foreigner, that should come upon us, could not but be astonished to see a Nation so full of all those things which use to create temporal Satisfactions, and yet to find nobody in it satisfied; to see so many Parties among us, and none prosperous. This is such a Riddle as would tempt a Man to suspect his Senses, and think we had all this while but dreamed of a Restoration; been under the Delusion the Prophét describes of the *hungry and thirsty man, that at his waking finds he is empty, and his soul hath appetite, Isaiah xxix. 8.* It is a sad, but visible Truth, that all that God has done for us, hath been so far from filling our Desires, that it has only served to enlarge them: For I appeal to any of our loudest Mutineers, whether, if, some Years since, the present State of Affairs had been represented to them, dressed in the worst Circumstances they now complain of, they would not then have thought it extremely amiable, worth *Rachel's* Prize of seven Years more Hardship; nay, whether they would not willingly have made some Abatements, relinquished Part of what they now enjoy, to have had the rest secured? And when God has granted us all we then asked, shall we murmur because we could now, perhaps, ask something more; and like ingrate Debtors, pick a Quarrel to evade Payment? Was it not enough that he engaged his Omnipotence for us, but must his Omniscience also be pressed upon the same Service, and provide all he could foresee we could wish? Alas, do we think we have the same Hank upon God, that some Gallants have on their trusting Merchants, that, upon Peril of losing all former Scores, he must still go on to supply us? Shall we think nothing fit  
for

for Oblivion but our Obligations? And in this perverse Sense transcribe St. Paul, *Phil. iii. 13. forgetting those things which are behind, reach forward to the things which are before*: This indeed too fully speaks us the Offspring of our first Parents; we can find no Gust in all the Fruits of Paradise, if any one be denied us, and still look not on what we have, but what we want; and as it is observed of the greedier sort of Creatures, that they relish not one Bit for the vehement Expectation of another; so is it with us, we devour, but do not enjoy our Blessings; and to require him to satisfy us, is to assign him the Poets Hell, set him, with *Belus's* Daughters, to the Task of filling a Sieve with Water, or rolling *Sisyphus's* Stone; our growing Appetites still keeping us empty and restless, amidst all Endeavours to make us otherwise; so that whereas God uses to commit his Favours to Men, as Seed to the Earth, in Expectation of an Harvest, some Fruits of Gratitude and Obedience; they seem with us rather to be flung into a Gulph, whose Property is only to swallow, never to fructify.

35. I know Mens Minds are so possessed with their Discontents, our daily mutinous Blasts have puffed up and swelled our Grievances to such Vastness, that he must expect to be very impatiently heard, that shall attempt to represent them in a lesser Size; yet sure it were not impossible, even upon a direct View, to demonstrate them very light and moderate: But upon a comparative perfectly trivial and inconsiderable. And it is a little strange, that we, who bare our late suffering Estate with so much Impatience, should not have Impressions enough left in our Memory, to confront to all our present Regrets. Do we not quietly now possess the Fruits of our own, or

*Our Grievances  
nothing so  
great now as  
formerly.*



our Progenitors Industry, without Danger of any Sequestration, but what our own Luxuries inflict? Are not our Persons at Freedom, delivered from that kind Word, and unkind Thing, SECURING? So that when we rise in the Morning, we need not fear our next Lodging shall be in the Gaol or Dungeon; nor when we sit down to our Meal, suspect the Intrusion of armed uninvited Guests, who ere whiles, we know, were wont to surprize us, as the Plague did the *Israelites*, even while the meat was yet in our mouths; are not our Lives under the Custody of known Laws, so that no Man is in Danger that will but keep himself within those Boundaries, nor need fear to be mocked into his Grave by Shews and Pageantries of Justice? And besides these real Escapes from Slavery, are we not rescued from the most embittering Circumstance of it, the having *servants rule over us*? a thing which rendered our Subjection as mean and servile, as it was sharp and pressing, and which we were then so sensible of, that it never missed to bring up the Rear of our Complaints. Lastly, if we reflect upon our higher spiritual Concerns, are we not freed from those boisterous robust Temptations, which, with the Violence of Famine and Sword, Beggary and Death, assaulted our Constancy, and left no Mean between Martyrdom and Apostasy? Are we not also restored to all those spiritual Advantages which we once professed so much to value: That Well of Life now lies open before us, after which we once panted like the Hart after the Water-springs; our ancient Worship is revived, and wants only our Attendance to make it solemn; whereas the *abomination of desolation* stood in the Holy-place, our Prayers were turned to Sin; needed, but were denied, the Liturgy to pray against them, or atone their Guilt. We have no longer Stones given us for Bread,

Bread, nor experiment that sad Riddle, of being at once cloyed and starved ; amidst Excess of Preaching suffering a Famine of the Word. And now are all these worth no Regard ? If they are not, why did we exclaim so loudly when we wanted them ? If they are, why are we still as querulous now we have them ? It is sure, these include all our great and substantial Interests as Men, and Christians, and those being provided for, it is not easily imaginable what others we should have important enough to make us querulous, unless it be those of Passion and Humour. One Man's Ambition perhaps wants a Satisfaction, another Man's Avarice, a third's Spite ; and this Discord makes up the very unmusical Harmony of our Murmurs. If we see but a *Mordecai* in the King's Gate, whom we wish removed, we can, like *Haman*, find no Gust in any thing we enjoy. If we see some, who we think have born less of the Burden and Heat of the Day, rewarded equally, or perhaps above ourselves, we are sure to make out the Parable, by murmuring at the good Man of the House : Or, if *Nineveh* be spared, if all be not executed to whom we have denounced Destruction, we, like *Jonah*, sit down in a sullen Discontent, and grow weary of our Lives, because others are permitted to enjoy theirs. To these, and other Heads of the like Nature, it is apparent our Grievances may be reduced ; and then, if the Balance be put into any dispassionate Hand, it is sure they can never become a Counterpoize to the other real Benefits we enjoy, but will, in the Prophet's Phrase, appear *lighter than vanity and nothing*.

26. But, I suppose, some will say, it is not only present Uneasinesses of which they are impatient, but the

*Our Fears and Jealousies afflict us more than our actual Sufferings.*

Possibility of future, a Fear of relapsing into our former Estate, by the ill Managery of our present : To these I shall answer, that admit it were so, yet sure it will be no Wisdom to anticipate our Miseries, to forestall Discontents, and make Foresight as painful as actual Suffering. In other forbidden Instances we choose to enjoy the present, and, with an *Epicurean* Indifferency, cry, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*, 1 Cor. xv. 32. How is it that we here become so unluckily sagacious, unless it be, that Murmuring is a Sensuality we account equivalent, nay superior to all rational Satisfaction, and therefore, that we may have no Intermission of that Delight, suborn our Fancies to find Occasions, and fetch in from the future those Supplies which the present affords not : But besides this, I should, in the second place, ask these great Diviners, why they do not also foresee, that this very mutinous Temper of theirs is the most direct and infallible Means of bringing those Mischiefs they pretend to fear ; that it is so, is most evident, and so well observed by our Adversaries, that there is little Doubt, they have not only Pleasure, but Designs upon it ; and to that Purpose have their Engines on work to blow up the hot Spirits among us, in Expectation from thence to raise a Flame. So blind a thing is Passion, that it hurries on to the Things which, in their Issue, we most abhor ; makes us our Enemies Drudges, and the Forgers of our own Shackles ; and whilst we cry out of petty Indulgencies, we ourselves give them in the Lump, what we grudge them in Parcels : This is a miserable Infatuation, and while we act thus unreasonably, we are sure no competent Disclaimers against ill Managery. But besides this natural Effect of our Murmurs, we are also to remember that there is a Divine Vengeance attending it : When Bounties and Largesses are quarrelled at, we  
necessitate

necessitate God to another Method, nay, indeed, not only his Vengeance, but even his Kindness seems to suggest it ; when he sees our Constitutions such, that his gentle Applications work contrary Effects, it is very apposite for him to try whether the Antiperistasis will operate on the other Side ; if we smart thus under Lenitives, it is but fit to essay, if Corrosives will ease us ; and the only remaining Experiment for the making us happy is to make us miserable.

27. But would God we might yet prevent the Need of such unkindly Expedients, and by a sober Estimate, and thankful Sense of what we have, provide to conserve it : Not fastidiously despise great and eminent Blessings, because, perhaps, they come not home to every Part of our Wishes. Alas, those plenary Satisfactions agree not with the Nature of earthly Things : It is an Observation long since raised from the globular and triangular Form of the World and our Hearts, that it is impossible the one should be filled with the other ; there will still be some Angles, some Vacuities left ; our very Accessions create new Wants ; and like an unsound Limb, the Healing of one Sore is the Breaking out of another. Every thing under the Moon partakes of her Vicissitudes, augments and decreases, only with this Difference, that tho' their Wanes be to as low a Degree as hers, they never are perfectly at the Full. There never was, nor never will be a State here completely happy : And as the Philosopher handsomely reproached the Impatience of the *Persian* King for the Death of his Wife, by undertaking to revive her, if he could help him but to the Names of three Men, that had never grieved, to write upon her Tomb ; so surely

*Impossible to have our Desires completely satisfied in this World.*



we may make the like Offer to our Malecontents, and engage to redeem all their Uneasinesses, if they can point us out (I say not three, but) one Age, wherein there were no Complaints. What then are our clamorous Repinings, but so many loud Invectives against God's Decree; a Desire to subvert his fundamental Law, and confound the Distinction he has irreversibly set between our earthly and our heavenly State? And, alas, what mad Insolence is this, to expect that the whole Oeconomy of the World must be changed only to humour us? that God must replant us a Paradise, pluck up every one of the Briars and Thorns which were our native Curse? Nay, bring down Heaven to us, and instate us in undisturbed unmixed Felicities? This is indeed, simply considered, a very wild Expectation, but yet more so, when it is considered how we qualify ourselves for such a Privilege: For, let me ask, are we as eager to anticipate the Holiness, as the Happiness of Heaven? Do we as passionately desire to do God's Will, as that God should do ours? and emulate the angelical Obedience and Purity, as much as Bliss? These are Interrogatories which need no verbal Answer, our Lives do too fully resolve them in the Negative; and then how shameless a Partiality is it, thus to carve to ourselves, and choose out of either State what we best like, reserve all the Sensualities of this World, and yet cry out for the Impassibleness of the next; but, alas, these are Pretensions as inconsistent as they are bold, our Vices having such a native inseparable Adherency of Pain and Vexation, that it is not the most dextrous Managery of a Sin that can ever sever them, but if we will retain the one, we must the other also: A Truth which might be exemplified to us throughout the whole Catalogue even of sensual Sins; but it is most eminently visible in this of Murmuring, which  
stays

stays not, as others do, to take Pain at the Rebound, and by way of Result; but has it as its first Element and Principle, it being itself almost as great a Pain, as any it can betray us to; and yet to secure an Advance and Perpetuity of Torment; every Event serves to foment and heighten it; and the most desperate Things are equally combustible to that Flame. Indeed, he that is possessed with that Humour, has a kind of Fury within him, that will never let him rest: And, alas, what Legions of such evil Spirits are now among us? How are we, as it were, inspired with Mutiny, it being the universal Dialect of the Nation, and of many in it, who cannot be supposed to found it in any Observation of their own, but are led by the common Genius, and bellow rather, by Consent, with the rest of the Herd, than for any Uneasiness, at least of Injustice and Oppression (for such only give Pretence for Mutiny); that themselves feel. And since it is become a plebeian Vice, would God our Gentry would use it as they do their Passions, and leave it off (if for no better Reason) for its being Vulgar: And indeed it were but equitable, that those who have taken up so many Sins upon Punctilio, should, for once, lay down one upon the same Score. The *Athenian* State put down their Ostracism (which otherwise they were fond enough of) because it was debased, by happening to fall on *Hyperbokus*, a despicable and abject Person: And there seems not much Difference in the Cases, save only that we are more tenacious of Sins, than they of Punishments; and I fear we shall so long retain this, till we find it its own Lictor, not only in the present Uneasiness, but in that more fruitful Harvest of Mischiefs, whereof it has now sown the Seeds. We see here what our Thankfulness is, for those eminent miraculous Mercies we have received, and the

Account

188 *Mischiefs from Mistakes* Chap. VIII.

Account of that is an unhappy Specimen what we are like to find, when we survey the Uses we have made of them, which God knows have been so unnatural and perverse, as does too fully parallel the former Instance.

*The Worship of God, tho' but lately restored, is yet already neglected by us.*

38. For, first, if we reflect upon our spiritual Blessings, what has the Enjoyment of those Advantages produced, but the Contempt of them? We have an easy free Access to God in his Sanctuary, our Churches are no longer Garisons to keep out the Worship to which they were devoted, but, like hospitable Doors, are open to the regular Piety of any that will enter. And now we have this Liberty, now the *flaming sword* is removed, we have lost all Appetite to the *tree of life*, can willingly let those *everlasting gates* (as the Psalmist stiles them) *Psal. xxiv. stand as everlastingly open*, ere we enter them: And though the Fabricks are, by God's Providence, rescued from their Dust and Ruins, yet many of us endeavour to reduce them to a yet worse Desolation, strive to depopulate those sacred Mansions, and execute against them that prophetick Threat concerning *Nineveh, Nahum i. Leave them empty, void and waste*; and indeed so they are, if not in an absolute, yet in a comparative Sense: For could we, at any Time of Divine Service, make an Estimate of all the Persons that are absent, it would scarce be discerned that any are there; were all Corners ransacked, what a Multitude of Recusants should we find, upon a far differing Account from that of Conscience? Some we should see stretching themselves upon their Beds, keeping a Sabbath indeed, but to their Sloth, not their God; others, perhaps, we may find roused from their Couches, upon the Summons not of Religion.

ligion but Vanity ; some new Garment is to be fitted, some exotick Dress essayed, and they who grudge one Hour to the Preacher's Glass, can spend many at their own ; where they are so taken up with their Idolatries to themselves, that they think of no other Worship ; nay, as the World goes, it were well this were the worst Diversion, that some did not keep from Church, that they might, in the interim, defile those lesser Temples of God they carry about them, and cut themselves off from the Communion of *Christ's body*, to make themselves *members of an harlot* ; Or that others were not *Bacchus* his Votaries when they should be God's, spend that Time in their frantick Revels, and sing a *Dithyrambick* instead of *Te Deum*. As for the Mammonist, if he keep any Holiday, it is, like the *Israelites*, to his gods of gold, *Exod. xxxii. 31*. He is looking with Veneration on his idolized Treasure, numbering those Bags he dare not use, or, perhaps, with a more active Zeal, pursuing the Means of increasing them. Thus, alas, may we go from one to another, and as it was in *Ezekiel's* Vision, see still greater Abominations, *Ezek. viii*. And certainly that all-seeing Eye which discerns what Multitudes do thus busy themselves, at the Times even of his solemnest Worship, cannot but adjudge us most profane Despisers of his Mercy in restoring it : Yet would to God it were only the Absent upon whom that Sentence would fall ; but alas, the Behaviour of many in the Church does too loudly testify how little of Devotion brings them thither, and at how mean a Rate they value all that is done there : Those Eyes which there should wait on God, as those of a servant on the hands of a master, *Psal. cxxiii. 2*. are rolling about to fetch in all the Vanities and Temptations which can occur to them, and look every Way but towards Heaven.



Heaven. Our Tongues, which should be touched with a Coal from the Altar, devoted wholly to Hymns and Prayers, are busied in private Colloquies with those about us : Business, News, nay, all the impertinent Chat of our most vacant Hours, is then taken up to entertain us ; so that he who would know the Talk of the Town or Neighbourhood, need go neither to Exchange nor Market, the Church will as certainly supply him : And this ill Employment of our Tongues, engages the like of our Ears, which, when they should be hearkening what the Lord God will say concerning us, are listening to those vain Discourses we hold with one another ; from all which outward Indecencies we may too surely collect the inward Irreverence of our Heart. And is it possible that this should now be the Temper of those, who not long since seemed to bewail their Exclusion from those sacred Assemblies ? Did we long for them as *David* for the Waters of *Bethlehem*, when they appeared unattainable, and when they are brought to us, refuse to taste them, pour them out, not as he did in Devotion, but in Contempt ? It is true, indeed, in temporal Delights Possession usually proves a nauseating thing, and takes off our Appetite ; but it uses not to be so in spiritual, whose peculiar Property it is, not to satiate, but excite by Fruition : But alas, though the Things we converse with are spiritual, our Hearts are carnal, and that is the Cause why, instead of crying out with the Psalmist, *When shall I come to appear in the presence of God, Psal. xlii.* We, like those in *Malachi* i. 13. *Snuff at his service, and say, What a weariness is it ?* A Weariness indeed it appears in the literal Sense with many, who sleep at it as Men over-laboured, and scarce take so sound Repose in their own Houses as in God's ; indeed such is the Variety of rude Behav-

our

our that is there used, that should an Unbeliever come into our Assemblies, he must surely (as St. Paul supposes in another Case, 1 Cor. xiv. 23.) say, *We are mad*; to see some gazing, some whispering, some laughing, others sleeping, and perhaps the far fewer Number praying, is such a Medley, as the most brutish Idolaters never admitted in their Worship; and the Way of worshipping *Mercury* by throwing Stones, or *Hercules* by cursing, is a sober and decent kind of Service compared with this. And now, alas, when will the Church recover its ancient Title, and become the *house of prayer*? It is sure, according to the present Appearance, it may have many more proper Names, that being the least Part of the Business done in it: It is true, there are some that make it a Sanctuary, but it is only against the Penalties of the Law, or Reproach of arrant Atheism; they come to save their Money or their Credit; others, perhaps, shun the Solitariness of being at home, and come not as to a Place of Devotion, but Concourse; and it is to be doubted, some visit that Place as they do many others, because they have nothing else to do: They want their Week-days Diversion, and so are driven thither upon mere Destitution of more grateful Entertainments; make it a kind of *Sunday Play-house*, sit there as Spectators or Judges, to see the Company, or censure the Preacher, but never remember that themselves have any other Part to act, or are beheld by him, who will not always be patient of such Profanation; but will, as the Scripture speaks, *Repay them to their face, who thus contemn him to his*. We know, among Men, every one counts his House his Fortress; and an Affront offered him there, doubles the Injury, and is not only a Contempt but an Invasion: And shall it not be a proportionable Enhancement with God also, thus to defy him within his

his own Doors, and approach his Presence in an impious Bravery, the more fully to shew him, how little we regard him? At this Rate, while we address ourselves, we may, as ill-mannered Guests, be forbid his House: Interrogated by God as the *Jews* were, *Isaiah* 1. *Why dost thou tread my courts?* A total abandoning of Worship being more fair and ingenuous than such Devotion; wherein, like the barbarous Soldiers, we bring Christ a Sceptre; only to smite him on the Head with it, and make a Preface of Homage, to give ourselves the Sport of the Mockery: Nay, it is sadly to be feared, that God may thrust us out of his House, shut his Doors against us, rescue his Service and himself from our Profanation, and put us again under the same, (or a worse Interdict than that) which lately lay upon us.

39. Having now seen our  
*The great Sin and* scandalous Irreverence towards  
*Danger of con-* God's Worship in general, it is  
*temning God's ho-* too easy to make Application to  
*ly Worship.* the several Parts of it; every

one of which must necessarily partake of the Contempt which falls upon the whole; for while we bring no Thoughts but secular with us; those are equally disagreeing to all the Divine Offices: It will be needless therefore to trace our Wanderings in each of those, since our whole Behaviour in the Church is one great Deviation from the Business we should come about: Yet that supercedes not to every guilty Person himself the Necessity of a more distinct and particular Reflexion. It is sure, at the last dreadful Audit, we must account for every of those spiritual Advantages we have abused; and alas, what a dismal Reckoning will many of us have then to give up, when our Prayers, which we now turn into Sin, shall be turned into Perdition? And we who would  
not

not supplicate our God, shall in vain invoke the *mountains and hills to hide us from the face of the Lamb*, when that Word which we now so fastidiously despise, that it must be dressed up in the Colours of human Rhetorick, to make us at all patient of it, and becomes then only tolerable to us, when it is farthest removed from being God's: When *that word*, as our Saviour speaks, *shall judge us*, and that gracious *invitation to life*, end in that fatal sentence, *Go, ye cursed*. Nay, when our very Propitiation shall plead against us, and the crucified Body of our Saviour, which we have *in effigie* so often re-crucified in our unworthy Approaches, or impious Neglect of the holy Eucharist, shall witness against us as its Murderers, when we shall be found not sprinkled as with the Blood of a Sacrifice, but imbrued as with that of Slaughter: When all these Means of our Salvation shall thus miserably convert, and from the *savour of life*, become that *unto death*, 2 Cor. ii. 16. then we shall, to our Amazement, find, how differing our Estimates of them were from God's; and in his Vengeance read the Value he put upon them. What then have we now to do, but to anticipate our Dooms-day, and *judge ourselves that we may not be judged of the Lord*. To make an impartial Account of all these our Profanations, and accuse ourselves before his Mercy-seat, that so we may prevent the Arraignment at his Bar of Judgment. And as Offenders are usually enjoined to acknowledge their Guilts in the very Places where they committed them; so let us make the Church the Scene of our Penitence, as we have of our Faults: By our strong Crying and Tears, deprecate our former Indevotion, and by an exemplary Reverence, redress the Scandal of our Profaneness. This, and only this, is the Way to secure us against the final Vengeance of these Sins; nay, and against the



intermedial also : For we are not to expect that so unkind Abuse of Mercy shall be wholly respited to another World, it being so exasperating a Crime, as must, in all Probability, awake God's Fury, and pull down present Judgments. I wish the Event do not too soon attest the Reasonableness of this Supposal.

40. If from our spiritual Blessings, we now descend to our temporal, we shall not appear much better Managers of those ; they being generally employed to Purposes the most distant from those for which they were given. And first, for our Peace, that great comprehensive Enjoyment, upon which all others are dependent, and which is to our civil Capacities, the same that Health is to our natural ; the Thing by which we relish and taste the rest of our Comforts, we may, from the Song of *Zachariah*, *Luke i.* learn for what Intent God bestows it : *Deliverance from Enemies* is to no other End, but that we may *serve God in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life* : But, alas, he that observes how we employ our Quiet, must surely say it serves little to the Advancement either of Holiness or Righteousness : For the first of these we have already seen, how little of Holiness we shew, even in that Place where nothing else should be admitted ; and we are not so preposterously religious, to shew more in others. That Piety which is so cold and benumbed, under the warm Breath of the publick Ordinances, we may well presume stark frozen in our more retired Offices ; and if it thus faint and sink in consort, it is sure more liable to the wise Man's *Væ soli*, and utterly dies when we are alone. It is true, indeed, these Closet-transactions are immediately visible to none but the

*Searcher*

*Searcher of hearts*, yet, in true Devotion, there is such a Symmetry and Proportion, that the Inferences we make by Analogy may be very irrefragable : Nay, it is to be feared many lie open to a yet clearer Conviction, and may be proved to have few or none of those private Intercourses with Heaven ; for though a Negative be not simply evincible, yet as in civil Cases, we prove a Man not to have been at this Time in such a Place, by his having actually been in another ; so, were the whole Week, Month, perhaps Year, of some Men exactly traced, we should find them so ingrossed with other Diversions, that there will scarce be found any Minute for Devotion to interpose : Mens worldly or fleshly Concerns so divide their Time, that God, from whom it is all derived, can be afforded no Tribute out of it. Yet alas, it were well if this privative Sort of Impiety were all we had to answer for : But it is too apparent we do not only neglect God, but reproach and violate him : What else are those bold and insolent Blasphemies wherewith we daily assault him, making him the Mark at which all our wild Passions are shot. Do we want any thing either for our Use or Delight ? Presently God is accused, his Providence or his Goodness questioned ; and he declaimed against, either as impotent or illiberal. Does any body vex or disquiet us ? God must have his Share of our Displeasure, his sacred Name must be profaned, and we count our fiercest Revilings of Men, faint and insignificant, if not inspired with the most dreadful and horrid Oaths ; nay, he stands obnoxious to all the Displacencies we receive, even from inanimate Creatures ; if a Die or a Card run amiss, our Resentments are presently vented upon him ; he is profaned and vilified, as if he were the Cheat that rooked us of our Money, because he does not secure us from those Losses, to which we wantonly

expose ourselves. Nor is it only our eager and warmer Passions that thus invade him; our pleasanter Moods do the very same, and we blaspheme by way of Divertisement; every impertinent Story or insipid Jest, must have the haut-goust of an Oath to recommend it; as every incredible Narration has to attest it; to say nothing of those more solemn and deliberate Perjuries, wherein we impiously suborn God's venerable and dreadful Name, to be the Engine of our Fraud and Malice; and, as if we thought he would forswear as well as we, bring him to countenance those Crimes he has vowed to punish. Thus do we with a prodigious Impiety contaminate even Divinity itself, make it the Sink for all our Puddles to run into, and prostitute that Name, which, as the Psalmist speaks, is *great, wonderful, and holy*, to all the unholy Purposes, our Passions, our Interests, or our Fancies can suggest to us.

41. This Profaneness is so proper a Foundation for Atheism, that *which commonly* per a Foundation for Atheism, that *ends in down-* we are not to wonder to see so *right Atheism;* many advance from the one to the other; they pay so little of the Reverence due to God, that at last they turn their Impiety into Argument, and infer him not to be God, whom they treat so unlike one. And truly this seems to be the grand Piece of Logick, which has disputed many, not only out of Christian but all native Religion. How unhappily successful it has proved among us, is too apparent in those impious Discourses which are every where heard, wherein Men are arrived to such a Licentiousness, that *David's* Atheist was a modest Puny, who only said in his Heart, *There is no God*, and perhaps, upon that Account, shall, by some, be adjudged to deserve the Epithet the Psalmist gives him, and be indeed thought

thought a Fool, that would not own what would now a-days so certainly denominate him a Wit, or in the solemn Stile, a *Master of Reason*. And indeed they will attest the Property of the Stile, they rather governing Reason, than being governed by it; otherwise it would be hard to discern, how from different Premisses the same Conclusion should be induced: And those who, in the late adverse Times, denied God in revenge of their Sufferings, should now pay their Gratitude also in the same Manner, and renounce him as (or more) loudly, since his signal Attestation of that righteous Cause; his not owning whereof was then their principal Plea. The Truth is, it is a little strange how Atheism could admit such enhancing Accessions as we find it has; for it being the Completion and highest Step of Ill, and that to which all others do but subordinately tend, one would think, it should, from its first Appearance in the World, have been so mature and full grown a Sin, as could be capable of no Improvement; but so subtilly wicked are these latter Days, that we can never be brought to a *non ultra*, but still find something to add to the completest Sin: Therefore, though of those that are really Atheists, one cannot be said to be more so than another, yet some may be more daringly and mischievously so; and sure, in that respect, our modern surmount all former: They were generally on the defensive Part, took up the Tenet as a Buckler against the unwelcome Invasions and Checks of Conscience, and designed nothing but the more peaceable Enjoyment of their Lusts; but now, Men do not only use but love it, make themselves its avowed Champions, seek to win it Profelytes; and, in short, appear so zealous for it, as if they made it their Religion to have none. And God knows, too many such reversed kinds of Evangelists we now have, who with



as great Design unteach Divinity, as the first Propugnors taught it; and their Number and Boldness have so increased since the Return of our Peace, that sure the next Age will have little Cause to think Religion had any Share in the Restoration. Thus have we done our Parts to supersede that Obligation of serving God in Holiness, by leaving no God to serve; and after the most signal Attestation of his Deity in our Rescue, we do, like those ingrate Persons, who seek to subvert those by whom themselves were established, and deny him because he has owned us.

*and is accompanied with  
Fraud, Injustice,  
and wrong  
Dealing,*

42. This is the Holiness wherewith we have served him, since our being delivered from the Hands of our Enemies, and our Righteousness has been very proportionable; for if we look into the Dealings of all Ranks of Men, we shall find the same Vein of Deceit run through all Transactions. A few Years since, Sequestration and Plunderings, those Wholesale Robberies, had so over-topped the rest, that, like an epidemick Disease, they had overwhelmed, if not the Kind, yet at least the Notice of all other Injustices: But since those Leviathans are withdrawn, the lesser Devourers supply their Place; Fraud succeeds to Violence, and in all Places, all Occasions of Commerce, we still meet with Sequestrators. The adulterated Wares and false Measures in Shops; the dilatory Proceedings and evasive Tricks in Law; the various and unworthy Cheats of Creditors, and the mean and dishonest Advantages which are watched in all Sorts of Contracts, are too irrefragable Proofs hereof. Nay, not only our Business, but our very Recreations expose us to these Deceits, as some of our bankrupt Gamesters can too sadly witness; what  
Troops

Troops of Harpies attend those Sports is every Man's Observation: It is strange so many should yet be to learn the Prudence to avoid so known a Danger, wherein a Man is at once made active and passive in the same Robbery, and does himself defraud his Family of that, whereof he is defrauded by another. But amongst these many Injustices, there is none wherein Men seem generally to find such a Gust and Sensuality as those wherein God is concerned; twenty Lay-booties humour them not so much as one from the Clergy; and if the Quakers should be mustered according to that one Tenet of not paying Tithes, we should indeed find their Numbers formidable. How subtle even the rudest Persons are in defalking those Dues, we see by every Day's Experiment, the over-reaching their Minister being the grand Triumph of a Rustick's Wit; so that not only their Covetousness, but their Vanity is concerned in it: I know it is the usual Apology for this kind of Sacrilege, that either the Maintenance of the Clergy is too much, or their Merit too little; for the first, I think it may be demonstrated, that there is no liberal Science, and but few mechanick Trades, from which a Man may not hope as plentiful a Subsistence as this affords to the generality of its Professors: However, I shall leave those that make this Objection to dispute it with that Authority, which has allotted them this Proportion; desiring them to consider, that whatever the Support of the Clergy is, it costs them nothing, no Man having purchased more than what remains of the Estate after his Tithe is paid. As to the second, I confess it is extremely to be wished, that the Negligence and Vice of some did not give too much Pretence to the Allegation; and to such I cannot but apply the Words of our Saviour, *Matth. xviii. 7. Wo be to the man by whom the offence cometh;*

*cometh*; yet certainly it is very incompetent to justify the Detention of their legal Rights; for, till the Law which has assigned them, delegate the Forfeiture to me, the greatest Enormities of my Pastor cannot intitle me to any thing that is his: And indeed what Blame soever is really due to some, we must expect it should extend to all, if the Accusers were to have the Benefit of the Mulet, and (as in the late Confusions) all Ministers should be made scandalous, in order to the making them poor.

*and with the defaming of our Neighbour, and endangering his Life by frequent Murders, and specially in Duels.*

43- It were easy to draw up a far larger Catalogue of those Injustices we daily commit; for as a Man has divers other Concerns besides his Goods, so he may be injured in all those: And truly the Iniquity of these Days seems fully commensurate to all the suffering Capacities of Mankind: We weigh our own and others Concerns in very differing Balances, and offer those Injuries without any Regret, which we can with no Patience suffer: How nicely jealous is every one of us of his own Repute, and yet how maliciously prodigal of other Mens? So that Defamation is become one of our main Topicks of Discourse, furnishes Entertainment to all Companies; the present owe their Divertisement to the absent, and many would be drained quite dry, were it not for this Reserve, which, like an inexhaustible Spring, still supplies fresh Matter of Talk. In like manner, how carefully do we avert any Hurt or Mutilation of our own Bodies, and yet how barbarously inconsiderate are we of others, to whom we do the greatest Outrages, rather than use any Violence to our Passion, or restrain an angry Humour: Only I confess there is one Instance, wherein, though we are unjust, we  
are

are not so partial, but expose ourselves also, and that is in the Case of Duels; a barbarous Custom, wherein it is hard to define, whether the Wickedness or Folly be greater; yet it maintains its Way in spite of all the Methods God has used to make us better or wiser: Of this there are too many, and too noted Instances since our Restoration, as if we were so enamoured of Destruction, that when we are prevented of it from our Enemies, we seek it from one another, or thought publick Peace so intolerable, that when it is cast upon us (as sure ours, if ever any may be said to be) we are fain to take in private Quarrels, as our Rescue from that dull Quiet, and court the utmost Mischiefs to avoid the Oppression of the greatest Happiness. Thus perversely do we countermine God's Purposes of Kindness; and when he has secured us, solicitously seek to be delivered from our Safety; project new Dangers, and dare his Power with a yet harder Talk, the *delivering us from ourselves*: And whilst we thus avert our Quiet, it is no Wonder that we produce no better Effects of it, nor fructify under that, which we will not permit ourselves to enjoy.

44. And as upon this general View, we appear very ill Managers of our *Our Plenty* Peace, so shall we much more, if we reflect on those many particular Blessings *ty is abused to Ex-* which are wrapped up in that, of which *cess and* we make so perverse Use, that we there *Intemper-* in no less violate Sobriety, than we *rance.* have already appeared to do Piety and Righteousness; so filling up the Measure of our Iniquity by transgressing all the fundamental Rules of Christianity, *living neither soberly, righteously, nor godly in this present world, Tit. ii. 12.* And of those Advantages which are the Appendages to Peace, there are two most eminent, Plenty and Liberty,



berty, both of which are the more remarkable in  
 our present Quiet, by how much the Deprivation  
 of each was the greater. For the first, we know the  
 late Times of Rapine, had torn from many among  
 us their whole Subsistence, so entirely despoiled  
 them that they were reduced to *Job's* Condition,  
 and connected the two extreme Points of Birth and  
 Death, by a middle State of the like Nakedness and  
 Destitution: And to such, our late Restoration was  
 a kind of civil Resurrection, raised them like *Elisha's*  
 dry Bones, from the most hopeless State, and by a  
 successive Possession of their own Inheritances, made  
 them Heirs to themselves. And though all were  
 not so wholly divested, yet like those *Canaanites*,  
 whom the *Jews* did not extirpate, they were put  
 under Tribute: And while Persons who knew so  
 well how to exact, were Lords Paramount, a bare  
 Being was all could be expected; they seemed ra-  
 ther Stewards than Owners of their Fortunes, and  
 had rather the Trouble than Advantage of their  
 Managery: And who would not think that this so  
 long Want of Plenty should have taught us Sobriety  
 in the using it? That Desuetude should have worn  
 out the Skill of Luxury, and we should not have  
 known how to be riotous: But alas, our Memories  
 have been too faithful to us in this Particular; no  
 one of our Vanities is fallen into Oblivion, but, on  
 the contrary, the Art of Voluptuousness so im-  
 proved, as if all the Time that was lost from the  
 Practick had been spent in the Theory, and we had,  
 for so many Years, been contriving new Kinds and  
 Degrees of Excess. Indeed, it is too sure, we re-  
 tained the Affection, when we had lost the Power of  
 Rioting; and it is not our Prosperity seduces us,  
 but we it. For as the Sun, though it lends its Rays  
 to the begetting of the vilest Insects, yet makes no  
 such Production but upon apt Matter, Slime and Pu-  
 trefaction;

trifaction ; so neither would the most opulent Fortune make us sensual, did it not find us disposed and prepared for it. How forcible those Propensions are, appears by the Multitude of Objects on which they work ; for they had need be strong Inclinations that take in all Opportunities, nay, Possibilities of actuating themselves, and such, it is evident, ours are, there being nothing capable of ministering to Luxury, which we use not to that Purpose. Our Meat is no longer apportioned to our Hunger but our Tastes : So that the Stomach is made merely passive in the Matter of Eating, serves only to receive those Loads we charge it with, whilst its Elections and Choices are forestalled by the Palate or Fancy ; nay, it is not permitted so much as a negative Voice, not allowed to refuse what is either for Kind or Quantity destructive to it : We do, with studied Mixtures, force our reluctant Appetites, and with all the Spells of Epicurism, conjure them up that we may have the Pleasure of laying them again. Thus unworthily treacherous are we to Nature, which, while we pretend to relieve, we oppress, by giving her not only beyond her Need, but Sufferance : And to shew we are no less dextrous in mixing Sins than Meats ; our very Pride (though in itself an intellectual Vice) mingles with our Gluttony ; every thing is insipid that is not costly ; and it is thought an ignoble Peasant-like thing to eat a plain Meal : Nor is he now to be looked on as a Gentleman, whose single Ordinary costs not as much as would be (and himself would perhaps some Years since have thought) a fair Exhibition for some whole Families. And that we may not be charged with partial Intemperance, we go not less in that of Drink ; wherein we are so nice and critical, that it is become a special Skill and Faculty to judge of Liquors : But how great  
soever

soever our Curiosity be, it is sure our Excess is greater, and does not only overmatch but supplant it, there being no Drink so unpleasant, which the Love of a Debauch will not reconcile us to. So great a Malice do we bear to our Reason, that to oppress it, we are content to expose our Darling, and do Violence to our very Sense. How unhappily predominant this brutish Vice is, need not here be told, since it too evidently attests itself to every Man's Observation, it no longer seeking the Shelter of Night and Darkness, but impatient of such Delay, appears in the broadest Light; and he is now a slow-paced Drunkard, that has not finished his Course, perhaps begun another, before the Sun has ended his: Nay, so is the Scene changed, that Sobriety is become a reproachful thing; such as even those who value it dare not own, and are either driven to preserve it by Shifts and Artifices, or else choose to abandon it rather than hazard the Scandal. And certainly this is the greater Advantage this Sin has for the propagating itself; for it is impossible Bestiality should be so universally agreeable to Mankind, that all should pursue it out of Appetite and Liking: It is this Fear that engages many in it; and though it hath too many Volunteers, yet sure it is this Press that helps to make up its Numbers; which, as it speaks the great Baseness of those who are thus ashamed both of Piety and Humanity, and had rather cease to be Men than appear to be Christians; so is it a sad Indication of national Impiety, a fatal Symptom that we have near filled up the Measure of our Iniquities, and are ripened for the Woes denounced against those who *call evil good, and good evil*, *Isaiah* v. 20. which sure was never more palpably done than in this Instance, wherein Temperance is branded for Ill-nature and Dulness of Humour, whilst the most swinish Excess must pass for Sociableness,

Sociableness, Friendship, and Hospitality; Names which have been so long prostituted, that they have lost their native Use, and Men have forgot those very distant things to which they originally belonged; yet sure such once there were: God made us sociable Creatures, and we might still continue so upon the Strength of that first Principle, and need not owe our Intercourse to our Debaucheries; no, nor our Friendships neither, which have been so far from being preserved that Way, that there is nothing more obviously and frequently violates them; nay, indeed, the whole Species of real Friendships seems to be extinct, since this fictitious sort took place. Men think it enough (as indeed it is too much) to damn themselves with their Friends, and all other Communications are transmuted into that of Sin; for we daily see those, who cleave the most inseparably in this kind to each other, will yet neither do nor suffer any thing else: And sure if this be Friendship, it is such a reversed Kind of it, as must have as preposterous a Definition, for none that have yet been given by Divines or Philosophers will fit it. The like may be said of Hospitality, which sure is, in its proper Nature, of a very distant Make from this, designed to relieve Strangers, not burden them; to cure their Wants indeed, but not by the worse Exchange of a Surfeit: So that the ancient and the modern Hospitality differ as much as that of *Melchisedec*, from that of *Circe*: The one refreshes, the other transforms: And how great a Shew forever of Liberality this latter may have, yet he is not to be thought to have drunk gratis, that has paid his Reason for his Shot.

45. And to both these Parts of Intemperance, our Uncleanneſs to Lust and Un- bears full Proportion, the one cleanness, makes provision for the flesh, and



the other fulfils the lusts thereof. To how brutish an Impudence this Sin is grown, is too visible: We need not trace Men into their Privacies and Recesses, themselves willingly proclaim their Guilt, nay, dread nothing so much as the Opinion of being innocent; yea, so out-dated a Virtue is Modesty now become, that even that Sex, to which it was once accounted the greatest Ornament, have put it off, look on it as a Piece of Rusticity and Country-breeding: Whether this pulling down the Fence be an Indication they are willing to lie common, I shall not determine: But sure that very free and confident Behaviour now in use, is too apt to invite Assaults, and takes off all that Extenuation of Crime, which was wont to be allowed that Sex, upon the Supposition of their being seduced? Thus do we publish our Sin as *Sodom*, and if we consider how much Boldness it has gained since the Return of our Prosperity, it will be probable, that ours also has been fomented by *fulness of bread and abundance of idleness*, Ezek. xvi. 49. That our Plenty is very subservient to it, appears by the vast Expence wherewith many Men manage this Vice; and that our Idleness is so too, is no less evident by the large Portions of Time that are spent in those Pursuits, it being, as the great Design, so the especial Business of too many Mens Lives. As for the Remedy which God has assigned, it serves now only to exasperate the Disease. Marriage, with too many, only advances simple Fornication to Adultery, and superadds Perjury to Uncleaness; those sacred Bands are like *Samson's* Withs, broken upon every Assault of the *Philistines*, and the very Thought of being confined makes Men more apt to range: For alas, it is not their Needs but their Fancies they are to provide for, and that is so endless, that the greatest Liberty of Polygamy would never satisfy it:

it: The same Quarrel would lie then to multiplied Wives, which does now to single, I mean that they were their own; and how numerous soever their Flock were, it would not secure their poor Neighbour's only Lamb; especially when it is considered, that in this they gratify two Sins at once, their Vanity as well as their Lust, their Complacence in undermining the Husband, being generally as great, as that in enjoying the Wife. And if Pride abstractedly, and in its own Nature, be, as *Solomon* says, *an abomination to the Lord*, certainly, when it is thus complicated, it must be infinitely more so, and ascertain a Concurrence of those Judgments, which are singly threatned to each of those Sins? What those are, I wish guilty Persons would seriously ponder; and then they would surely think their momentary Pleasures much over-bought. But, alas, such a fascinating Sin this is, as allows Men no liberty of Consideration, they go on as the Wiseman says, *Prov. vii. 22.* with the same Stupidity that an *ox goeth to the slaughter*, or a *fool to the correction of the stocks*; and while every body else observes the Effects of their Vice in their wasted Bodies, and ruined Estates, themselves are the last that discern it, pursue the Course, till the very last Remains of Strength and Wealth are exhausted, and nothing left them but Disease and Beggary. Of the Truth of this there have been too many sad Examples, though it seems not yet enough, to give Caution to others.

46. And to these *lusts of the flesh*, we spare not to add those of the eye also; for so surely we may properly call all those Luxuries which adapt themselves peculiarly to that Faculty; such are the Gaiety of Apparel, Richness of Furniture, and all the

*and to Pride  
in Apparel,  
Furniture,  
and Equipage,*

Splendor of Equipage which has no Propriety to any other Sense, but that of Seeing, and is lost if it be not looked on : And though these seem to differ much from that Covetousness which St. *John* is supposed to comprehend in that Phrase, the one being the Tenacity, the other the Profusion of Money ; yet they are but several Branches of the same Sin, and are diversified only by a various Application to the Object : For in strict speaking, he that covets Gold and Silver to lay on his Back, is as properly covetous, as he that designs it only to fill his Coffers. But besides the Propriety these Excesses have to that Title, they have no less Claim to that ensuing, *the pride of life*, it being evident that they are both Effects and Fomenters of Pride : And sure this sets but an ill Character upon them, that when the Apostle has divided all the Lusts of the World into three Sorts, these bid so fair to two of them. I would not here be understood to condemn that Decency and moderate Expence which agree to the several Ranks and Qualities of Persons, there being not only a Lawfulness, but some kind of civil Necessity for such Distinctions ; nor is the levelling Principle fitter to be admitted in Habit, than in Title or Estate : That which I accuse is quite another thing, it being that inordinate Profusion which does not only exceed the Ability and Fortune of the Person, but the Proportion of his Rank and Condition, and so confounds that Distinction it should preserve, and levels us the wrong Way ; it being more tolerable that all should be Peasants than all Lords. And this is the Irregularity that many seem to affect, there being not only an Emulation of Pomp and Bravery among Equals, but those of the most distant Qualities, there seeming now no other Measure than the utmost Extent of their Money or Credit, the latter whereof is often so stretched, that  
it

it not only cracks itself, but, by an unhappy Contagion, breaks those it deals with, and like a Grenado, tears Towns in Pieces : The many ruined Families of Tradesmen do too sadly attest this : Would God our Gallants would consider how unequal it is, that many should want necessary Cloathing, only to maintain the Superfluity of theirs ; an Injustice which not only upon a religious, but politick Account, deserves the severest Reproof, and since divine Laws will not restrain it, it were well if human were provided : Though, I confess, it were not easy to find out Penalties to deter those, whom the Wants so usually attending these Excesses will not discourage. This Sort of Vanity was once thought peculiar to Women ; and though I cannot say that the Sexes have exchanged Faults, (because each still keeps its own, together with those of the other) yet it is evident they have communicated them ; and as the Women of this Age have transcribed masculine Vices, so the Men have feminine ; this particularly, wherein they seem fully to answer the Copy, they being as critically knowing in all the Mysteries of Vanity, and as diligent in reducing their Speculations to Practice, as any the most extravagant Female. Indeed both the one and the other pursue this Folly with so great an Expence of Care, Time, and Money, as, if to be fine and happy were the same Thing, and their Bodies had been designed for their Cloaths, rather than their Cloaths for their Bodies.

47. And now, when all these Luxuries are to be served, it had need be an exorbitant Plenty that shall supply them ; and that will unfold the Riddle so frequent among us, of so many being poorer since they recovered their Estates,

*which hath occasioned the Ruin of many Families and great Estates.*



than when they wanted them : Our Revenue, how large soever, is so clogged and incumbered with our Vices, that they moulder away, and only serve to carry other Mens with them, by giving Credit to run in Debt. There are, indeed, no such unmerciful Exactors as our own Lusts, the one gleans after the other, till they induce such a Scarcity as the Prophet *Joel* describes, i. 4. *That which the palmer-worm hath left, hath the locust eaten, and that which the locust hath left, hath the canker-worm eaten, and that which the canker-worm hath left, hath the caterpillar eaten :* So that, in effect, we have only changed our Oppressors, and are as much, or more, exhausted by our own Sins, as we were before by other Mens, with this woful Circumstance, that now we have the Guilts as well as the Sufferings : Thus do we rob ourselves, and create Want in the Midst of all that Abundance God has given us, using our Plenty as the *Benjamites* did the *Levite's* Concubine, *Judges* xix. force and prostitute it, till we destroy it ; and the Similitude holds in this also, that what we thus violate is not our own ; for let us fancy what we will, certainly our Superfluities are more the Poors Right than ours, assigned to them by God the grand Proprietor. So that our Excesses have, besides their proper Guilt, that of Injustice superadded ; and when the Cry of the Poor shall be joined to those of our Riots, they will certainly be too clamorous to let Vengeance any longer sleep.

*Our Liberty is abused to the Breach of the Laws and Contempt of the Government ;*

48. This is the Account we can give of our Plenty, and that of our Liberty is not much better ; it is not long since that arbitrary Tyranny expired, which gave us no other Measures of our Duties or Punishments, than the Will or Avarice

Avarice of the Imposers: And then how did we gasp to be under the Conduct and Protection of known determinate Laws? Yet now we have them, who considers them, or is regulated by them? Between the Licentiousness of Inferiors, and the Remissness of Superiors, they are rendered Things only of Form, not Use; for while the one violates, and the other connives, what can they signify? And though there be never so many new Laws made to assert the old, yet we see they serve for little but to partake of the same Contempt with the others, and are but like the Chimeras of an *Utopian* State, sagely contrived, but to no Purpose. It is the Execution of Laws that gives them a real and effective Being, and without that, amidst our great Volumes we are yet destitute, and may too probably experiment the Truth of that Axiom, that *it is better to live where nothing is lawful, than where all things are.* Indeed, if we remember how the Statutes of *Omri* were kept, with what a Tameness the severest Impositions of the late Usurpers were submitted to, we have Reason to think Coërcion is the surest Principle of vulgar Obedience, though, withal it sets but an ill Mark upon us, who know so much better how to be Slaves than Subjects. And as we are restored to our civil Liberty, so as a Branch or Consequent of that, we are to our personal also: We were lately in the Condition Christ foretold to *St. Peter*, carried by others whither we would not, *John* xxi. 18. but now we gird ourselves and go whither we will; and alas, what Use do many of us make of this Freedom? Is it not visible, that neither our publick nor private Affairs are the better attended? but, on the contrary, we are in a restless Pursuit of impertinent or vicious Pastimes, go Pilgrimages to our Pleasures, wander about from this Sport, that Meeting, to another, till many of

us

us forget we have any other Concerns in the World, and are as much Strangers to our own Homes, as when we were forcibly detained thence : And for such I know not whether the former Restraint be not eligible, to be a Prisoner being a kind of Rescue to him, that would otherwise be a Vagrant.

*which is an Argument of horrible Ingratitude and Disingenuity.*

49. These are the Uses we make of those Advantages whereof God has repossessed us. I know it is too envious a Task to distribute these Accusations to every Rank and Order of Men among us ; I have here given them in the Lump, and wish that not only such Degrees, but each Person would adapt to himself his peculiar Share, wherein, contrary to other Dividends, I fear the only Immodesty and Injustice too will generally be for every one not to carve liberally for himself. However, it is sure, in the gross, they make up the Character of a most barbarously ungrateful Nation. God was pleased to return our Peace, before we had forsaken our Sins, as if he meant to try our Ingenuity ; that we who had been so much worse than Beasts under the former Method, that no Stripes would discipline us, might have this Advantage to redeem our Credit, and be drawn with these Cords of a Man : But we have put off not only Piety but Humanity, and are equally untractable to all Methods. And now who can refrain from *Moses's* passionate Apostrophe, *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish People and unwise, Dent. xxxii. 6.* Unwise, indeed, that from the most benign Purposes of God, extract nothing but our own Mischief ; are the poorer for his Liberalities, and the worse for his Goodness, by a preposterous Use so wear out our Blessings, that they cease to be, at least to be Blessings : And if they once fall from that, there is no middle

middle Form for them to assume ; they convert into the direct contrary, and become the fataleſt Curſes, more heavy than thoſe which were originally deſigned as ſuch, that Degeneration adding Malignity, and no Fury being ſo extreme, as that which bottoms upon repelled and irritated Love. God's Mercies are like thoſe Pictures, which, according to the different Poſition of the Beholder, carry different Representations ; if we ſtill ſtand on the wrong Side, and not take them in their more amiable Appearance, we ſhall find they can put on a dreadful : His Goodneſs will not be finally unoperative ; if we will not permit it to lead us to Repentance, it will drive us to Deſtruction. I am ſure we have all Reaſon to expect he ſhould exert his Power as eminently againſt us, as he has done for us, unleſs, perhaps, he ſees that it is not neceſſary to our Ruin ; for, indeed, let him but ſtand by and not interpoſe his Omnipotence for us, he may truſt us to be his Executioners, our Vices having a natural as well as moral Efficacy to deſtroy us. And who knows whether that be not the Reaſon of his ſeeming Connivance, that he forbears to ſtrike us, to give us up to thoſe more fatal Wounds we inflict on ourſelves ; this, alas, we have too much Cauſe to fear, for it is ſure it is not our Innocence that gives us Impunity, but it is more than probable it is our Incurriſſibility, that God gives us over with a *why ſhould ye be ſmitten any more ?* will not prostitute his Judgments, but, as the baſeſt of Malefactors, leave us to the baſeſt of Executioners, and let our Iniquities become our Ruin. This, as it is the ſevereſt Purpoſe God can entertain towards us, ſo it is our moſt important Concern to avert. And O that we, who have ſo perverſely reſiſted all the Deſigns of his Love, would now try to defeat that of his Anger, rob him of thoſe inteltine Aven-  
gers.



gers within our own Breasts, those *fleshly lusts which fight against the soul*, 1 Pet. ii. 10. which do not only provoke, but execute his Wrath, and make us more miserable than Hell itself could do without them; and God knows it is more than Time for us to seek an Escape from so formidable Mischiefs: O let us not contract one Minute's Delay, let us cast ourselves at the Feet of our offended God, and as those who are condemned to disgraceful Executions, use to petition for some Death of less Infamy, as a Boon and Favour, so let us beg, that he will please to think us worth his own Correction, that whatsoever we suffer from his Hand, yet that we may not (like to *Herod*) be delivered up to the loathsome Fortune of being devoured by our own Putrefaction. In a word, let us form *David's Choice* into an importunate Prayer, and earnestly beg that we may *fall into the hands of God, and not into the hands of men*, at least not of ourselves, who are more to be dreaded than all our other Enemies.

50. Indeed till we do thus, our  
*God will call us one Day to an account for all these Things.* Prosperities are far from real, and do in this justify our most mutinous Repinings, that we are never the better for them, nay, much the worse; yet since it is only we that have enervated them, they will stand upon our

Account in their proper Weight and Value: When our Receipts are summed up, God will charge us with them, not as those empty uselefs Things we have made them, but as those great and solid Blessings he intended them. And certainly this is most deplorable ill Managery, to reserve nothing to ourselves but the Burden and Account of our good Things; to enjoy nothing, and yet be answerable for all. In secular things Men usually pay with some Regret for those things of which they have only anticipated

anticipated the Use: But with what dismal Reluctances shall we come to pay for these, of which we have made no Advantage? and must therefore pay the dearer because we have not; it being not so much the Things, as our employing of them to our Benefit, whereof God will exact Account. His Anger is then only incensed when we resist his Love, and his only Quarrel to us is, for frustrating his Design of making us happy. And sure those well deserve his Wrath, that will provoke it on such Terms; yet so perverse is the Choice, as of all Sinners in general, so especially of this Nation at this Time, who have all before us which might make us happy in both Worlds, if we did not madly affect to be so in neither. God grant we may recover the Sobriety to make wiser Elections, before it be out of our Power to make any, and we be found to stand to the Mischiefs of our own wild Option.

51. The Reader will, perhaps, think I have gone beyond the Limits of a moderate Digression; but the too great Copiousness of the Theme, must be my Excuse: Such over-grown Vices cannot well be drawn in little; and where there is such a Multitude, the most superficial View of each, is rather proportionable to a distinct Tract, than to the few Pages it has borrowed in this. My greater Fear is, that the Event may prove it impertinent, there being not much Hope that a private Whisper shall be heard by those, who are deaf to the loudest Calls of Heaven, and have made no other Use of those various and signal Providences we have been under, than to defeat the Design of them.

## C H A P. IX.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from Disputes in general.*

*Christian Religion much injured by our over eager Disputes and Contentions about it,*

1. **T**Hese are some of those many Artifices, whereby Satan, like a cunning Picklock, slyly robs us of our grand Treasure, the Power and Efficacy of our Christianity, and leaves us only the empty Casket, the Name and formal Profession; that which serves only to make us proud, not rich, confident, not safe: And God knows, so many are daily thus befooled by him, so many fall as Preys to these his Stratagems, as might, one would think, glut the eagerest Malice, and supersede all farther Designs: But so insatiate is this grand Devourer, that Retail-prizes, though never so frequent, do rather enrage than satisfy his Appetite; he is Enemy not only to this or that Man, but to Mankind in gross: And therefore, as if he feared that even his Malice might not prove indefatigable enough for so many distinct Pursuits, he contrives more compendious Methods of Destruction; frames such Engines as take off whole Ranks, nay Troops; compounds such active Poison, as like a Pestilence, kills Multitudes at once. It is too trivial a Mischief to annoy the outward Parts, it is his Mastery to spread an unseen Venom in the Bowels, thence to diffuse itself throughout, mix with the vital Spirit, and convert that kindly Heat which should animate, into those wild irregular Flames which ravine and consume. And this is done by that pestilential Spirit of Division, that Heat of Disputation which has,

has, for so many Ages possessed and wasted the Catholick Church; and, by an unhappy kind of Magick, transformed the Zeal of Christian Practice into an Itch of unchristian Dispute, made the Questions about our Creed more numerous than the Letters of it, and, by Multitudes and Contrariety of Paraphrases, so confounded and obscured the Text, that what was anciently the Badge and *Tessera* of Christian Communion, serves us for no other Purpose, but as an Occasion of breaking it.

2. So long as the Church retained the Simplicity of Christian Doctrine, looked on her Faith as the Foundation of her Obedience; and endeavoured to propagate to her Children such an Understanding of the one, as was most apt to promote the other; she happily made good the Title Christ gives her,  *Cant. vi. of his love, his dove, his undefiled one;*

*which have turned the ancient Simplicity of Christians into Wrath and Bitterness towards one another.*

but when the Serpent had once got into this Paradise, infused his Subtilties, and nice Intricacies into Mens Brains, and lest that should not be ruinous enough, his Venom also into their Hearts: Then began all those unhappy Metamorphoses, in comparison of which, those of the Poets are as trivial as they are fabulous; then that Faith which was once inseparably joined with the Patience of the Saints, forsook that tame Company, and linked itself with the most contrary Qualities of Wrath and Bitterness, and those whose Profession it was to resist unto Blood, striving against Sin, pursued to Blood those that resisted them in any of their Speculations; then that passive Valour which had rendered them so venerable to their Heathen Enemies, converted some, tired out others, and amazed all, sadly degenerated into that active Ma-



lice, which, from *persecuted Christians*, intitle them to that monstrous Stile of *Christian Persecutors*. And that ardent Love, which had offered up so many *Holocausts* to God, was supplanted by that fiery Hatred, that made no less acceptable *Oblations* to Satan.

3. This miserable and destructive Change was so much the Interest of the Enemy of Souls, that we cannot wonder he should so studiously promote it; and indeed never did he at once so approve his Malice and Subtily, I would I could not say, Success also, as in this Design, in comparison whereof, all his other Projects speak him but a Puny, this is his one *Goliath* Stratagem, which has served him not only to defy, but even defeat the armies of the living God.

4. Nor is his Sagacity more observable in the Choice and main Drift of the Design, than in the Ways of effecting it; had he brought into the Primitive Church those large Scrolls of disputable Points, wherewith he has filled the Modern, that more charitable Age must needs have startled and discerned, that that seeming Jealousy for Truth, was indeed nothing but a real Design against Peace; and would surely never have parted with that sacred Depositum, that precious Legacy, so lately bequeathed by Christ, for those vain Janglings, those School-subtilties which now entertain the World. But as he that would divert a Man from the Guard of some important Treasure, alarms him in some other of his greatest Interests; so he at first raises up Heresies of the greatest Magnitude, whose blasphemous Consequences so shook the whole Fabrick of Religion, that what was *Uzzah's* Rashness seemed then

then every Man's advised Duty, to put his Hand to the upholding of the tottering Ark. How could those who had been baptized into the Faith of the blessed Trinity, suffer the *Arians* to rob them of the second Person; the *Macedonians* of the third, the *Valentinians* and *Manichees* so to despise the first, as to set up against him a rival Principle of Being? How could those who had so solemnly renounced the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, see them all bowed to by the temporising, unclean, idolatrous *Gnosticks*? These were such Invasions as seemed to commissionate all that could wield the Sword of the Spirit to take it up and engage in this Warfare. But all this while it was a sad Dilemma to which the Church was driven; if she gave Countenance to these Seducers, she betrayed her Faith; if she entered the Contest, she violated her Unity; the one would undermine her Foundation, the other would make a Breach in her Walls.

5. And the Devil was too old an Artist to lose the Advantage; he knew well, that even a just and necessary Defence does, by giving Men Acquaintance with War, take off somewhat from the Abhorrence of it, and insensibly dispose them to farther Hostilities; and therefore he failed not to provide Sparks for that Matter, which was now grown so combustible; nor did he always send them from the bottomless Pit, but sometimes borrowed Fire from the Altar to consume the Votaries, and by the mutual Collision of well-meant Zeal, set even orthodox Christians in a Flame. A memorable Instance of this was the Dispute about Easter; wherein, while the Veneration they had of the glorious Resurrection of Christ, prompted them to commemorate it in the

*and hath occasioned a great deal of Quarrel and Contention in (or about) lesser Matters,*

exactest Manner they could, the Serpent creeps into this Paradise, and though they had the same common End, yet, on occasion of some little dissenting in the Way, the Heat of Devotion insensibly degenerated into that of Contention ; and by being very renacious of a Circumstance of that Celebration, they lost the more essential Requisite, that of Charity ; kept the Feast indeed, but with the Leaven of Malice, and absurdly commemorate the Redintegration of his natural Body, by mutilating and dividing his mystical. So likewise, in the Business of Rebaptization, while one Side, in a pious Abhorrence of Heresy, thought the Stain, like that of original Sin, could not be done away by any Purgation less solemn than that of Baptism, and the other, in a just Reverence of ancient Custom, and Jealousy of Innovation, opposed it ; the Dispute lasted till the Scene was changed, and those who deliberated of the Manner of receiving Hereticks into the Church, were themselves, as such, turned out of it. No less well-meant were the Originals of the *Novatian* and *Donatist* Heresies, and as equally unhappy were their Issues : For in them all, when bitter Zeal was once fermented, through its Aptitude to receive, and the Devil's Vigilance to administer Occasions, the Orthodoxy or Heresy of Lives soon became Terms out-dated, and Men were measured only by Opinions : That *sword of the spirit*, which was at first designed against vicious Practices, had its Edge turned against speculative Notions ; in so much, that, at last, like that of *Isab*, 2 *Sam.* xx. 8. it had got such an Aptness to fall out, that it was always a ready Instrument of Execution, till even a philosophical Point, as that of the Antipodes, was resolved with an Anathema ; and not to know the System of this present World, made Forfeiture of that to come.

6. But,

6. But, alas, these, though great Defections from primitive Unity, were but modest Essays, and feeble Assaults, compared with those which infested the succeeding Ages : This *root of bitterness* was then but a Probationer in the Soil, and though it sent forth some Off-sets to preserve its Kind ; yet Satan was fain to be at some Pains to cherish and nurse them up, placed them under the Shadow of the Sanctuary, and got them, like the treacherous Ivy, supported by that Piety they were designed to destroy ; but it was not long ere they had got firmer Rooting, and Strength, not only to propagate but multiply. Every Dispute in Religion grew *proliferical*, and in ventilating one Question, many new ones were started : And as Questions grew numerous, so did Sects too ; every Opinion almost constituted a new Party, and those again subdivided into many others ; so that of all the first Violators of Primitive Unity, we scarce find any, who did not revenge their Schism upon themselves, by separating one from another, as they had all done from the Church, till at last the Progeny both of Sects and Opinions grew so numerous, that he who would exact an Account, must be sent, like *Abraham*, to the Sky or to the Shore, the Stars or Sands being as apt a Subject of Arithmetick as they. Whence it is brought to pass, that Satan now may leave his toilsome Labour of compassing the Earth ; Men do his Business for him, giving him leisure to be only a cheerful Spectator of their Divinity-prizes, the bloody Combats of ecclesiastical Gladiators.

7. And that he may be secured never to want that pleasing Divertisement, the later Ages have been care-

*which that wicked one hath improved into innumerable Sects and Schisms, which swarm in the Church.*

*Our Disputes are now be-*



*come a particular Art or Science in the Schools,*

ful to train him up Combatants, it being now become a distinct sort of Learning, a new Species of Divinity, to raise nice Questions, create new Difficulties, branch out with fond Distinctions our holy Faith, which the pious Simplicity of the first Christians received to practise, not to read upon as an Anatomy, unbowel and dissect to try Experiments, much less to bring into the Theatre, there made to fight and bleed, to shew Men Sport, and try the Skill of the unhappy Swordmen, the Masters of Defence. *The form of sound words,* which, in its native Frame and Constitution, was most enlivening and salubrious, dissolved and melted by chymical Preparation, ceases to be nutritive; and after all the Labours of the Alembick, and Hopes of an Elixir, insensibly evaporates, and vanishes to Air, or leaves in the Recipient a foul Emypreuma, or fretting Corrosive; an endless Dotage about Names and Words, and then as endless a Quarrel for them, appearing the commensurate Effect of the long Studies of those Distillers in Divinity, who boast its Sublimation.

*whose too curious and subtle Distinctions have promoted Contention, to the Loss of mutual Love and Charity.*

8. It is indeed a thing worthy of the greatest both Wonder and Lamentation, to see how the plainest, and most simple Proposition, when it falls into the Hands of these Artists, is mangled and disjointed, is rarified, exalted and refined: He whose Leisure, or indeed whose Life, would serve him to survey all the subtle Divisions and Distinctions of the Schoolmen, would sure resolve, they had the Power of working Miracles, Questions, in their Hands, multiplying in the breaking, like the Loaves in our Saviour's. But sure the Event of the Miracles.

acles are very disparate, no solid Nourishment being derived by the one, but, on the contrary, Stones given us instead of Bread, and those too for the worst Purposes, even to sling at one another, as if, because stoning was the Death of the first Christian Martyr, we designed his Charity to the same Fate with himself; that divine Gospel Grace having since fallen under as thick a Shower, and with this sharp Aggravation too, that whereas he suffered from *Jews*, *Christians* are become its Executioners; whilst those who pretend to be Champions of the Faith, irrefragable, angelical and seraphical Doctors, not only fill the Church with Quarrels whilst they live, but bequeath them in their Writings to Posterity; as *Zisca* is said to have done his Skin, to be made an Incentive to War and Confusion.

9. It was the Policy of *Julian* to shut up the Fountains of human Learning from the Christian Youth, lest they should there gain such Acuteness, as might render them the more formidable Adversaries to Paganism: But could he have foreseen that they would have employed those Weapons not against the common Enemy, but one another, he would surely have reversed the Stratagem, freely opened those Magazines whence they might furnish themselves for their mutual Ruin, and have as solicitously promoted their Learning as ever he obstructed it. I am very far from abetting their arrogant Folly, who either decry human Learning in general, or make it such a *Moabite* or *Ammonite*, that however it be admitted in civil Converse, must be interdicted the Sanctuary. Our Religion prescribes us rational not brutish Sacrifices, and therefore despises not any of those Advantages which  
may

*The Plainness  
and Simplicity  
of the Christian  
Religion is  
perplexed and  
confounded  
with Philoso-  
phical Niceties.*

may improve our Reason, exalt the Man, and depress the Beast in us: Yet sure we shall derogate very impiously from Christ's prophetick Office, if we allow not Divinity to be the supreme and noblest Science, such as is to be served and attended, not regulated and governed by those inferior: But that just Order seems now to be inverted; divine Learning is brought down to human, the Simplicity of Christian Doctrine so perplexed and confounded with philosophical Niceties, that *Plato* and *Aristotle* are become the Umpires, of our Religion, and we must go ask Heathens how far we shall be Christians. Those deep things of God, as the Apostle calls them, 1 Cor. ii. 10. and of which he pronounces the natural Man an incompetent Judge, are yet brought before that Tribunal, subjected to be scanned by Rules of Art: But, alas, our Line is too short to sound those Depths. Men rashly undertake to understand incomprehensible, to order infinite, define ineffable Things: And then no Wonder if their Conceptions differ; for where there is no visible Truth, wherein to center, Error is as wide as Mens Fancies, and may wander to Eternity: While Multitudes run Careers in the Dark, it is not strange to have them jostle and overthrow each other.

*We should be more careful to practise the plain Truths of the Gospel, than curiously enquire into the Mysteries thereof.* 10. And, doubtless, were the Controversies which have so long harassed the Church thoroughly examined, many of them would be found of this Nature. An humble Belief has been judged too sluggish and dull an Exercise for Men of acute Parts, and therefore they would not take Faith's Word that so it is, unless Reason will be her Surety, and shew them how;

but sure it had been much for the Peace of the Church

Church and Safety of Souls, if Mysteries had been permitted to be Mysteries; that those sublimer Parts of our Faith had been entertained with more Veneration and less of Disquisition, and that, while even the learnedest do acknowledge them to be Abysses, they would not confute that Confession, by attempting to fathom them. But, alas, so preposterous has been the Procedure, that those Things which were indeed inexplicable, have been racked and tortured to discover themselves, while, in the mean time, the plainer and more accessible Truths, as if despicable while easy, are clouded and obscured; so many subtile Queries raised about them, that the Theorick of Christianity is become harder than the Practick, a Grace is much more readily acquired than defined, and that Key of Knowledge which should give us Entrance into the Closets and Recesses of Religion, is, by so much tampering and wrenching made useless; serves only to busy us at the Door, and so, in effect, proves rather a Bar to keep us out, than a Key to let us in. Thus perverse are the Contradictions of human depraved Nature; which, like our first Parents, take it unkindly, that God has reserved any thing from us, and boldly attempt to break down his Inclosures, to rob him of his Peculiar; and yet, in the mean time, as industriously contrive to rob ourselves of our own, by cancelling both Parts of God's Distribution, neither leaving *secret things to the Lord our God,* nor *the revealed ones to us and our children,* Deut. xxix. 29. Certainly the first Propagators of our Faith proceeded at another Rate; they well knew that not the Brain but the Heart was the proper Soil for that celestial Plant, and therefore did not amuse their Profelytes with curious Questions, but set them to the active Part of their Religion. We see what brief and plain Instructions St. Peter gives his



his *Catechumeni*, *Acts* ii. 38. *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the remission of sins*; and this, it seems as a full Preparation for the Gift of the Holy Ghost, which he there promises upon these only Conditions. This was that vigorous Seed which at once sprung up suddenly, and rooted deep too, and produced the liberal Harvest of that Day: But sure had those three thousand Souls been catechised by our modern Casuists, we had seen a wide Difference, not only in the Expedition but Success. In like manner we see, *Acts* viii. how short a Creed qualified, in St. Philip's Judgment, for the Eunuch's Baptism: And we find St. Paul, whose Education enabled him for the subtlest Definitions, yet delivers his whole Doctrine in this Compendium, *Acts* xx. 21. *Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*; and it is observable how he introduces this with a Profession, that *he had kept back nothing that was profitable for them*, Verse 20. and seconds it, Verse 27. with another, that *he had not shunned to declare unto them the whole counsel of God*; from whence it is obvious for the shallowest Discourser to infer, that the whole Counsel of God, as far as it is incumbent for Man to know, at least *necessitate medii*, is comprized in that one Breviate of evangelical Truth; and certainly, whilst all the Division of these Generals, was the distributing them into Practice, they were found most fertile Seminaries of all Virtue; but when they came to be dichotomised, and cantoned out into curious aërial Notions, they lost their prolifick Nature; that fruitful Land became a Wilderness, a wild and intricate Maze, where Men sooner lose themselves, than find either Truth or Holiness.

11. When Christianity first attested itself by Miracles, it produced in the Hearts of its Converts,

*Primitive Christians desired*

a firm Assent to the Truth of the Doctrine, and an awful Reverence and Adoration of that God, who had given such Power unto Men, awaking them to an Enquiry after Duty, so to propitiate that Omnipotence whose Fury it appeared impossible to bear : And this, sure, was a much more genuine Effect, than if they had busied themselves in those many unprofitable Curiosities, nice, yet bold Enquiries into the divine Attributes, which now-a-days serve only to supplant that pious Veneration we owe to them.

12. In like manner, the comprehensive Enunciation of Christ, *Mark xvi, 16. He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned,* was received by the first Christians, as the Condition on which the two so distant States of Salvation or Damnation depended, and accordingly excited their Diligence to attain the one, and avoid the other. And this, certainly, was a much more concerning Employment, than to have entertained themselves with the modern Dispute, whether some antecedent Decree of God had not irreversibly determined them to the one or other ; a Disquisition that has served only to keep us idly busy, set our Heads a working, but folds up our hands like *Solomon's Sluggard* in our Bosoms. So also, when *St. Paul* affirms it the Design of Christ's giving himself for us, to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works ; the primitive Christians had no other Design than to comport with that his Purpose ; to be what he died to make them, and to attest their Zeal to good Works, by being actually rich in them. They took Christ's Word, that he that gave the meanest dole for his sake, should not lose his reward ; thought themselves sure enough upon

upon his Promise, and never disputed the Proportion either of Worth or Congruity between the Work and Wages ; and had the Modern done the like, our Works had not so unhappily evaporated into Words, we had talked less and done more.

*The multiplying of Creeds and Opinions bath divided the Faith and decayed the Life of Religion.*

13. It were easy to draw the Parallel through all the Points which busied the Devotion of the first Ages, and the Curiosity of the latter : By all which it would be evident, how much Christian Doctrine has lost in its Efficacy, since it gained in its Bulk ; how we have embased our Coin by multiplying it, and have divided our Sum into so many, and so small Fractions, as our Arithmetick can scarce number, never unite. We should think him very ridiculous, that should hope to advance his Crop, by grinding the Corn he sows ; yet, methinks, this has been the Method of our spiritual Husbandmen, who have scarce suffered one Grain of our Faith to escape entire. It is said that the Ant, when she lays in her Winter-stock, bites the Ends off the Corn, as being Naturalist enough to know that will certainly prevent its sprouting. And sure that little contemptible Creature, whom *Solomon* appoints to preach Industry to the Sluggard, may, in this Point, read Philosophy too, to our greatest Doctors ; convince them that the Seed which they mangle with so many Distinctions and Divisions, will never spring up into Christian Practice : It will rather be like the Dragon's Teeth *Cadmus* is said to have sown, whose immediate Production was a hostile Band combating one another ; a Fable, which, God knows, we have found too sadly moralized in our School-contentions, only with this unhappy Difference, that ours are

are more immortal ; our serpentine Breed fight, but never die, oppose, but destroy not one another.

14. And then it will not appear strange to see the first Seeds of Discord so prodigiously increased, that they now overspread the Face of the Earth : For, whereas in all other things there is a Succession, one Generation goes and another comes, and so, though the Species continue, the Individuals perish ; these seem to have the accursed Privilege of propagating and not expiring, and to have reconciled the Procreativeness of corporeal, with the Duration of incorporeal Substances : This is such an Advantage toward their Multiplication, that we may grieve, but cannot wonder to find them swarm, not like Bees to bring Profit, but like Locusts to devour every green thing in the Land ; nor is it now in the Power of all the Magicians of *Egypt* to cast them out : For, were it possible ever to become Satan's Interest to suppress them, he would certainly find himself in the Case of one of his young Conjurers, to have raised more Spirits than he could lay. Mens now irritated Passions, and formed Interests, the great Fomenters of Disputes, would prove too sturdy Devils, even for Beelzebub himself to exorcise.

15. But it is too sure his Kingdom will never so divide against itself ; it suits not only with its Nature, but with his Ends, to perpetuate our Strifes ; and therefore, as if our doctrinal Debates were not enough to secure his Purpose, he has an auxiliary Troop of ritual Differences to attach us. The Leprosy which infests the solidier Parts of our Religion, has passed from the Body to the very Garments ; the most exterior

*The Church is over-run with Schism and Contention,*

*which is now kept up in smaller and lesser Matters.*



terior Adherencies, Habits, Gestures, Days, every thing that has but the remotest Subserviency to Piety, are become the Objects of fierce Contentions, and have so increased the Number and Heat of our Quarrels, that it is unnecessary, perhaps impossible, to add more ; if he can but keep up these, as God knows he is too like to do, his Kingdom will be competently guarded, they being his greatest Security against that Power of Godliness, that vital Force of Christianity, he so much dreads : That they are so, is obvious enough to him that takes but the grossest confused View of them. But that we may better discern the Degrees of his Advantage, and our own Mischief, it will not be amiss to consider them more attentively, make some distinct Observations, not of all, for that were endless, but of some of their most eminent Effects, which we shall find so pernicious and destructive, as sufficiently speak their Relation and Subserviency to the great *Abaddon*.

*Contention about Things indifferent makes us backward to those that are of greater Concern;*

16. And, in the first place, if we consider them only privatively, as they supplant and jostle out our greater Concerns, we shall find them sadly mischievous, indeed to such a Degree, that were they not chargeable with any positive Ill, they were by this their mere negative Force, competent Instruments of our Ruin.

Did they actually convey no Venom, yet while they subtract our Nourishment, their Effects will be sure to be deadly, Grace, as well as Nature, being liable to be starved as well as poisoned. Christianity is not a dull unactive, but stirring busy State, and therefore we still find it in the Gospel represented under the Metaphors which imply the greatest Industry and Activity ; it is a Trade, a Watch,

Watch, a Race, a Combat, and it assigns us Task enough to justify the Propriety of the Tropes : And therefore, as on the one Hand the sleepy Professor will at last find he has but dreamt of those glorious Rewards he expects ; so, on the other, he that frames himself another Scheme, that labours, but not in God's Vineyard, that busies himself in things extrinſick to that one great Sphere of Motion, the evangelical Precepts, will finally discern that he has but rolled *Sisyphus* his Stone, espoused a Toil under which he may indeed be weary and heavy laden, but will never find rest to his Soul.

17. And then what can be more perfectly adapted to his Aim, who desires to propagate his own eternal Restlessness unto us, than thus to commute our Tasks, exchange these pleasant and gainful ones, which God assigns us, for those uneasy and fruitless, we impose on ourselves ?

*which is the Devil's Policy to keep up our Differences and Divisions.*

It is true, we find too many of those unprofitable Works of Darkness to busy and employ us : But I think no one, nay, I am apt to say, not all others together, have proved so effectual to his Purpose as this of raising and maintaining Parties in Religion. It is too usual a Policy of States to secure themselves from the Fear of a potent Neighbour, by fomenting a civil Discord in his Kingdom : Satan has, in this Instance, found it a lucky Stratagem, it having proved the most powerful Revulsive of his Danger. I will not examine, whether he borrowed it from, or lent it to our *Machiavilians*, but sure he may, from his own Experience, recommend it with the Attestation of a *probatum est*.

18. Indeed this Art of Diversion gives him a full Security against all he fears in our Christianity, for it

*Our Disputes in Religion divert us from*

*minding the great Business of our Souls.* is not the Title he envies to us, or dreads himself; we know he long since had Courage to contemn the Name even of Christ, when invoked by those whose Practices joined with him in defying it; while we are but *Jewish* Exorcists, make no other Use of Christ, but to get us a Reputation and a Trade, he can deal well enough with us. Seven Sons of *Sceva* are not half so terrible to him as one *St. Paul*; it is him only he fears, that to the *form* has joined the power of godliness; that Exorcism he knows he cannot resist, and therefore has very dexterously found a Way to divert it, by engaging us in those Contentions which allow us not to think of the practical Part of our Profession; by the confused Noise of Battle quite drowning that Voice behind us, which says, *this is the way, walk in it.* Nay, by this Subtilty he does not only divert, but forestal also; like the *Philistines*, allows no Spear or Sword that may be used against him, but takes up all those Instruments by which we should work the Work of God. We know to all Affairs of Importance there are three necessary Concurrents, without which they can never be dispatched, Time, Industry, and Faculties; and the more weighty and difficult the Business is, the greater Degree of each of these is requisite. Now, certainly, the Interest of our Souls is not the slightest Concern we have: The avoiding eternal Misery, the acquiring endless Bliss, is not so trivial or so easy a Matter, as to be the Work of a Moment, the Purchase of some few yawning Wishes, or volatile Fancies; he who is to dispense the Rewards, has proposed us other Conditions, assigned us Work which takes up no less Time than that of our whole Lives, no less Intention than of our whole Powers; and then, if we suffer any thing else to interpose, and defalk what is thus entirely

irely requisite ; if we cut new Channels for that which should run in this one full Current, it is easy to divine what the Event will be : For Man being finite both in his Nature and Operations, the Time and Attention he bestows on one thing, must necessarily be subtracted from another. And therefore, if our Disputes about Religion entertain and busy us, they must unavoidably interrupt our Attendance on practick Duties ; and so, whilst we quarrel with one another, give our great Master too just Ground of Quarrel with us all, by neglecting the great, and indeed the only Business intrusted to us.

19. Now, indeed, that our Contentions do thus divert us, is too apparent to any that shall consider it in any of the three forementioned Particulars ; for, first, for our Time, they do not only insensibly steal away much of it (a Modesty which most other Diversions do still retain) but magisterially exact it, and accordingly have large Parcels of it solemnly and avowedly devoted to them, the scanning old Questions, and raising new ones, having been the professed Business of many Mens Lives, their very Vocation and Trade, wherein they have arrived to such Eminence, as shews they made liberal Oblations of their Time to it : And of this every Age has left so many Records, as the mere reading them would allow few vacant Minutes to the succeeding ; and had not Time a little revenged his own Quarrel, and consumed many of those Writings, by which himself was wasted, the Hyperbole would not be very extravagant in this Case, which we find warrantably used in another, *John xxi.* that even the world itself could not contain the books which have been written. As it is, there are more than enough to employ, nay, devour Time ; for when Men once

*Our Disputes  
rob us of too  
much of our  
precious  
Time,*



launch into the vast Sea of Controversy, they are tossed there endlessly, and seldom recover a Harbour, Difficulties, like Waves, crowding one upon the Neck of another; and accordingly we see, in polemick Disputes, how every Rejoinder swells bigger and bigger, till, like the Prophet's Cloud, from a Hand-breadth it over-spread the Heavens, every little Manual becomes the Parent of vast Volumes; and unless the Evil cure itself by Majoration; unless the Greatness of the Task brings in Despair to supplant Curiosity, and keep Men from reading, the Spectators will have as little Respite as the Combatants; both Writers and Readers will be so engrossed, that they will have little Leisure for any thing else. And I dare in this appeal to any that have engaged deep either Way, whether they have not found it experimentally true: I wish they would but snatch some broken Parcel as a Plank from the common Shipwreck of their Time, rescue a few Minutes for a sober Reflexion, and audite what real Profit accrues to them from the Expence of so many precious Hours; how much it advances that grand Business for which their Time here was allotted, and according to which their Eternity hereafter will be awarded; always remembering, that if it promote it not, it hinders it, by diverting that Time which should have been so employed: And indeed there cannot be a more comprehensive Mischief than this of the Loss of Time, it being that which virtually contains the frustrating of all other Advantages, whereby we should work out our Salvation. The Operations even of Christ himself were, he tells us, limited to a certain Season: *I must work the work of my Father whilst it is day, the night cometh, when no man can work*; and if the Night overtake us, it matters not how we are stored with Instruments of Action, since they all at once then become

become useless. Our Laws anciently set a greater Penalty upon the stealing Beasts of Breed, than on other Cattle of the same Species; as calculating the Damage by the Possibilities of which the Owner was robbed. Time is the universal Womb of Things and Actions; and therefore, when we lose that, we suffer an accumulative Prejudice, forfeit our Rights in Reversion, as well as our Possessions, our Capacities, as well as Enjoyments. As in an Abortion the unhappy Mother, besides the Frustration of her Hopes, and Child-birth Pains sustained, acquires an Aptitude to miscarry for the future, and never to be able to bring forth a vital Birth; and thus, God knows, Multitudes of Embryon-purposes perish, and the Misery of it is, they are our best that do so. We generally pursue our frivolous Projects with an active Vigour, but keep our great and concerning Affairs only in Design, till Death come and surprize us, which, like the fatal Metamorphoses the Poets talk of, fixes us in the Posture it finds us, and so presents us to Judgment. Now I would know of the most eager Contender, whether he would not choose then to be found with his Hands stretched out in Prayer to God, or Alms to the Poor, rather than dealing Blows amongst his Fellow-servants; if he would, certainly it is his Concern to put himself into that Form he would then appear in, to husband his little Span of Time so, as may stand him in stead when Time shall be no more.

20. But if Men will needs be improvident, yet why will they be ridiculous too? If they will barter away their Time, methinks they should, at least, have some Ease in Exchange, but to be industrious ill Husbards, to lose all their Advantages, and none of their Toil, is such a solemn Piece of Folly, as is at  
and mis-spend  
most of our  
Strength and  
Industry,  
once.

once Matter of Scorn and Wonder ; yet this is the very Case here ; our Wranglings do not only exhaust our Time but our Strength too ; we pursue them with so vehement an Intention, as if our Faith proposed not to us any other Victory, but over this sort of Opponents ; we run ourselves breathless in this Race, where the Prize is only a few fading Leaves, or what is more transitory, a little popular Applause ; and make not towards the incorruptible Crown, till we are grown too feeble and decrepit for the other Pursuit. Men macerate their Bodies and waste their Spirits in polemick Studies, prescribe themselves no Time of Discharge from that War, till they are able no longer to wield their Weapons, and then, when mere Impotence makes them peaceable, begin to cry out of Contention, snatch up Devotion when Controversy begins to be too heavy for them, and at their Death pray for that Peace of the Church which they have made the Business of their Life to disturb. This, as it sufficiently attests what Mens Thoughts are in their cool Blood, what Apprehensions they have of the Way when they draw near their Journey's End, so does it abundantly evince the unspeakable Prejudice Piety receives from our Disputes ; those have the active and vigorous Abettors, while that is turned off to languishing bed-rid Votaries. So that the Division between these two, is like that of the Cattle between *Jacob* and *Laban*, all the stronger to the one, and feebler to the other : Would God the Scene were not in one respect changed, and that the *Syrian* had not here got the better Share. But, in the mean time, what greater Advantage can Satan wish for, our Strength and Industry is diverted upon these foreign Expeditions, and *Sion* is left to be guarded by the Lame and the Blind, such only as are not able to follow the Camp, and then it is not  
strange

strange to see what successful Assaults he has made, that that true practick Virtue which once made such victorious Sallies on the Heathen World, is now baffled in its own Quarters, beaten from its Works, and driven to seek shelter in obscure Corners, immures itself in some few private Breasts, and so, like an exiled Prince, makes only shift to live, when it should reign. But, alas, shall we for ever suffer ourselves to be thus befooled, shall this his stale Stratagem, after so many hundred Years Use, nay, and Detection too, lose nothing of its Efficacy? Must we always waste our Strength in forging Shackles for ourselves? This is such an Infatuation as *Hosea* speaks of, ix. 7. *The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad*: Would God we would once put ourselves under the Discipline of serious Recollection, it might, perhaps, cure the Phrensy: Let him who has, with unwearied Diligence, watched all Advantage against his Antagonist, racked and tortured every Period of his Discourse, to make it confess an Absurdity: Let him, I say, consider, how much better that Industry had been employed in discovering the Fallacies of our common Adversary, that old Sophister, who puts the most abusive Elenchs on us, whilst we are most busy in putting them upon one another. Good God! how might true vital Christianity at this Day have flourished, if we would have bestowed our Pains the right Way? At how much a cheaper Rate might we have cherished than we destroy her? All Parties pretend to be very careful of this Vine, are very busy in setting Traps for the little Foxes, all whom they are pleased to call Hereticks, and, in the mean time, take no care of the wild Boar, let that not only spoil her Branches, but stock up her Roots, suffer the most savage bestial Vices to destroy both Power and Form of Godliness together. Thus unhappily  
do



do we divert our Intentions from our most important Concerns. And as *Archimedes* is said to have been so vehemently intent upon a geometrical Figure, that he heard not of the taking of the City, till an Enemy gave him his Information and Death together : So do we so busy ourselves in drawing our several Schemes of Religion (every of which will pretend to no less than Demonstration) that, in the mean time, that which alone is true Religion, is exposed to the Fury of the Enemy, sacked, ruined, and like the ploughed up *Jewish* Sanctuary, not one Stone left upon another. Certainly most of the Questions which at this day disturb Christendom, have, in respect of their Matter, no Propriety toward the propagating good Life, but, in Reference to their Way of Managery, all Aptness to hinder it ; how much were it then for our Ease, as well as Profit, to turn us into the plain Road, where none of these thorny Difficulties will incumber us ? Alas, why should the *Romanist* so sweat to maintain his Purgatory Flame, as if he already felt its Heat, and would, in this World, antedate those Pains, when the same Industry bestowed here, to purify himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, would subtract the Matter of that Fire, and leave little for that Furnace to refine ; which were doubtless a much securer Way, even according to his own Principles, than to trust to the uncertain Devotion of others, to fetch him out when once deeply ingulphed : It is surely much better to starve that Fire by one's own Innocence, than to leave it to be extinguished by the Tears and Piety of surviving Friends. Why should the *Socinian* so eagerly contend for the Possibility of keeping the Law, when one Example would convince more than a thousand Arguments. Let him bend his Study to make himself an Instance of his own Doctrine ; and then, though

though he do finally fail in proving his Hypothesis, yet, if he do his utmost, he will not fail of a better Triumph than that which the Schools can give; and so will even from his Error extract Advantage, his very Straying will, by a happy Antiperistasis, lead him into the Way. Why does the Predestinarian so adventurously climb into Heaven, to ransack the celestial Archives, read God's hidden Decrees, when, with less Labour, he may secure an authentick Transcript within himself; let him, according to St. Peter's Advice, *add to his faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, &c.* and that Chain of Virtues will stand him in much more stead, than if he could as infallibly (as some have confidently) demonstrate every Link of Predestination: It is the assiduous Practice of Duty will make his Calling and Election sure; and unless he can confute that divine Axiom, that *without holiness none shall see the Lord*; he cannot but confess, he may more profitably busy his Thoughts in labouring to become holy, than in disputing whether he can choose to be so or not. Or, lastly, why do we Christians of several Persuasions, so fiercely argue against the Salvability of each other, as if it were not only our Opinion, but our Interest and our Wish, *That all should be damned but those of our particular Sect*; when God knows, not only every Society, but every single Person has enough to do, to *work out his own salvation*, which, if we will take the Apostle's Word, is to be done *with fear and trembling*, Phil. ii. 12. a Temper very widely distant from that of censuring and judging. And sure we should not think that Malefactor more meriting, or more likely to be acquitted, who should leap from the Bar to the Bench, and there condemn the whole Gaol but himself. It was a sober and Christian Reply of a late learned Gentleman, who  
being

being asked by one, Whether a Papist might be saved? answered, *You may be saved without knowing that.* And would we confine our Cares and Enquiries to those Things which concern that one great Interest, we might take less Pains, and yet do more Work; be less busy-bodies, but more fruitful Christians; and then sure it is Time we ask ourselves the Wiseman's Question, *Eccles. v. 16. What profit hath he that laboureth for the wind?* and at last give over this unthriving Diligence, and not so emulate the most stupid of Beasts, as to make ourselves Burdens, only that we may couch under them.

21. And were this only *Issachar's* and *misemploy the great Parts and Abilities of the more knowing and learned.* Lot, it were the less to be regretted, but also *Zabulon* herein invades his Portion; it is they that handle the pen of the writer, that have engrossed this Error, and will not suffer it to be a Plebeian one. None do so much this Way misemploy the two vulgar

Talents of Time and Industry, as those who have a third superadded to them, that of extraordinary Faculties and Endowments, which they do as prodigally lavish as either of the former. The Beginners or Abettors of Contentions have generally been Persons of the most acute refined Wits, and excellent Learning, which has enabled them for those Quirks and Subtilties of which grosser Understandings would have remained more happily ignorant. A strange Production, that the greatest Beauties of Nature and Art should engender the foulest Deformity in Religion. Thus, alas, have Satan's Altars the Pre-emption of God's, the fattest Oblation brought to feed the Fire of Contention, whilst that of Devotion expires for want of Nourishment. It was indeed no Wonder, that the blind Zeal of Pagans had made him so wantonly nice, that none but

but the choicest Victims would serve his Turn, none but an *Andromeda* and an *Iphigenia*, Royal and Virgin Sacrifices propitiate his infernal Deities : But that among Christians he should still have the same Election, have the richest Treasures of those who say they war against him, laid at his Feet, have his choicest Weapons out of his Enemies Magazine, is a Riddle that can scarce be solved, but by concluding Idolatry has only changed its Form, and that he sits as securely enshrined in Mens Passions and Animosities, as ever he did in an Idol Temple ; so that he seems rather to have lost the Pomp than the Power of Regiment. But admit, that he were not herein so immediately God's Rival, that these speculative Debates had none of those Adherencies which do so directly gratify him, yet still he is secured of gaining somewhat at Rebound ; for, alas, when Mens Faculties are thus employed, what Weapons are there left for the Defence of true practick Virtue, and God knows she needs them but too much : Mens Lusts are grown subtle Disputants, so that the most improved Reason may find Work enough to manage the Contest ; and surely, would Men of Parts timely have bent their Endeavours this Way, Vice could not have got so strong a Party. Men are ashamed to be Profelytes to a weak Arguer, as thinking they must part with their Reputation, as well as their Sin : And certainly, nothing is a more general Discouragement from Piety, than the Opinion of its Votaries not being Persons of Parts, and exalted Understandings ; a Prejudice as old as the Time of our Saviour, as may appear from *John vii.* Would God our greatest Rabbies would sadly consider how much they have contributed to this Scandal, while, by laying out their Parts on polemick Niceties, they have neglected the more weighty Part of their Business, and



given too much Attestation to that scandalous Maxim, that *Ignorance is the Mother of Devotion* : Certainly, this is quite to mistake their Commission, which is not that of a Herald, to proclaim War amongst Men, but that of an Ambassador, to reconcile them first to Holiness, and by it to God : And, doubtless, one Soul gained to Piety, would more promote their Account, than many Thousands secured to a Sect or Party. We find how sad the Doom was of that Servant who wrapt up his Talent, but we have no Cause to think it would have been at all easier, if he had melted the Talent into Bullets, to maintain the Skirmish with his Fellows : Whether that be not the Case of some who have received not the one Talent but the five, I leave it to be discussed between God and their own Consciences ; but, in the interim, it is sad to see how unhappily Men engage their Endeavours, which seems to represent the Reverse of *Isaiah's* Prophecy, we have beat our Plough-shares into Swords, and our Pruning-hooks into Spears, all the Instruments of Fertility and Growth in Grace, into Engines of War and Discord ; and then it must needs be a most deplorable Condition to which Christianity is reduced ; which seems in this to be under the same Calamity which her distressed Professors suffer from the *Turkish-Tyranny*, whilst her hopefulest and most pregnant Children are, like Janizaries and Timariots, trained up to fight against her. And let none wonder that I call it fighting against her, when yet, perhaps, none of them do formally renounce her ; for that Circumstance only determines the War to be intestine, not foreign ; and if our own sad Experiences had not too much qualified us to judge, I might appeal to the universal Vote of Mankind, which of those were the most destructive. Indeed, were there no other Act of Hostility discernible, but that which we have  
hitherto

hitherto insisted on, the intercepting her Supplies, the cutting off from her that Time, Industry, and Gifts, whereby she would be nourished and supported, that were irreparably injurious to her, and consequently most grateful to that grand Enemy, who, as hath been shewed, makes Advantage of our Wranglings or Dissensions with one another, to wreck his more inveterate Malice on us all.

CHAP. X.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from Disputes, as they supplant Charity.*

I. **B**UT, alas, the Mischief of these Debates can never be described by bare Negatives; there are Multitudes of positive Ills, that inseparably adhere to them, and those of so destructive a Force, that if Christianity were beleaguered and famished by the former, she is stormed and battered by these, and so is ascertained to sink under all the Methods of Ruin. In the Front of these we may well rank those Displacencies and Animosities which are the Product of our speculative Differences, and which do indeed so naturally result from them, that it is not to be hoped, so long as the one continues, that the other will ever cease. For though, in Practice, we often see a bewitching Sin dethrone the Reason, and make Men act as if they had no such superior Principle to guide them, yet, in Matters of Speculation, their Affections are generally strongly influenced by their Understandings. We do not only approve, but love those Notions wherewith we are prepossessed, which

*Our Disputes  
are a great Ob-  
struction and  
Hindrance to  
our Charity.*

Kindness, as it propagates itself to the Abettors of the same Tenets, so also it insinuates Dislikes to the Opposers. And as that Opposition advances, so the Disgust does too, till at last the Scene shifts, and the Persons are at a greater War than the Opinions. But we need not thus derive a Proof from the Causes, when the Thing does too demonstrably attest itself by the Effects; for what Issues are there of the mortallest Hatred, which do not plentifully flow from this Fountain? Human Nature, we know, has but three Ways of actuating its Passions, by Thought, by Word, and by Deeds; and we may surely conclude the Feud very bitter that employs all these Engines, as it is too visible this does; for though the former of these be in its own Nature inscrutable to all but Omniscience; yet the two latter are, according to Christ's own Rule, of the *tree by its fruits*, infallible Criteria of them; and those make such liberal Discoveries, that I think I may appeal to any who have espoused a Party, whether they have not, with the first discriminating Rudiments of their own Sect, imbibed a secret confused Prejudice to all others. Nay, I fear there are but few of so mortified Passions, as to have stopped there, and not advanced to a direct Aversion, and Alienation of Mind. Indeed, were it not for this, it were scarce possible for so many of the Vulgar, to be such Bigots in their several Factions; for, alas, their Intellects are generally too gross to have any clear Apprehension of the Points they contend for; their Leaders only give them some general confused Notions, just enough to excite their Displeasure against all Dissenters, and then their Anger must presently be called Zeal, and instead of the more uneasy Task of suppressing their Passion, this Expedient serves at once to hallow and gratify it: Nay, so ridiculous have some Mens Prepossessions of this kind been,

C  
be  
tir  
bu  
me  
cal  
the  
to  
gul  
Ba  
the  
To  
con  
wit  
thin  
befo  
Gov  
whi  
stan  
rally  
the  
with  
have  
writ  
Guil  
as to  
ous  
mick  
vecti  
to R  
their  
and v  
bates  
Passio  
Wote  
utter  
Fury  
Trans

been, that they would scarce allow those to be entire Men, whom they thought not sound Believers, but have fancied, I know not what, bodily as well as mental Monstrosities in those they were pleased to call Héreticks; a Piece of childish Credulity which the Emillaries of some Factions have not disdained to make their Advantage of. But these inward Disgusts and Rancours are but the first Bound of this Ball of Contention, when this Leaven is once in the Heart, it will quickly diffuse itself, and both Tongue and Hands will be tainted with it. Hence comes it, that Disputes in Religion are managed with such Virulency and Bitterness, that one would think the Disputants had put off much of Humanity, before they come thus to treat of Divinity. The Government of the Tongue is a Piece of Morality which sober Nature dictates, which yet, in this Instance, many even of our greatest Scholars seem totally to have unlearned; for whether we consider the unseemly Reproaches, or rigid Censures, where-with almost all Parties pursue their Antagonists, we have Reason to say with St. James, *the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*: Would God their Guilt of this kind, did not so loudly proclaim itself, as to supersede the Need of Proof. It is too obvious that the Satyr has usurped the Chair, and polemick Discourses are degenerated into Libels and Invectives; our Controvertists fall from Arguments to Reproaches, as if their Zeal lay more to blast their Adversary's Fame, than confute his Error; and were this only in personal extemporary Debates, it might have the Excuse of an indeliberate Passion. Indeed it were to be wished, that all Words of this sort might vanish in that Breath that utters them; that as they resemble the Wind in Fury and Impetuosity, so they might do also in Transientness and sudden Expiration: But, alas, a



Course is taken to immortalize them, they become Records, and our most elaborate controversial Writings, like the Earth after the Curse, over-run with these Briars and Thorns, Sarcasms, Contumelies and Invectives filling so many Pages, that, were those weeded out, many Volumes would be reduced to a more moderate Bulk as well as Temper. Nor are our Censures any thing more modest than our Reproaches, every petty Difference is mutually upbraided to each Party as a Defection from the Faith, so that we scarce know a milder Name than Heresy, nor Doom than Damnation. And as if the visible Obliquities or Errors would not afford us Indictments enough against one another, there is a closer Inspection made, every Position is ripped up, and curiously dissected, to see what Embryo is in its Womb, what Seeds there are of monstrous Productions, which, tho' perhaps the native Strength of the Principle would never have animated, yet the preternatural Heat of an Antagonist can quickly hatch them (like the Chickens at *Grand Cairo*) into Life and vigorous Being: And if by a long Chain of (perhaps fallacious) Inferences, some such Imputation is fastened upon a Thesis, then all who embrace that, are charged also with all this spurious Brood, tho' they never so solemnly renounce and disclaim them; a Practice sure very uncharitable. For suppose such Consequences never so regularly deduced from my Opinion, yet so long as I seriously disavow and detest them, I may indeed be thought unwise in not discerning the Connexion, but sure not impious. So that unless Want of Logick be a damning Sin, no Man can hence be authorized to pronounce me reprobate: And I cannot think that God, whose Rigour bends against the Faults of our Wills, rather than our Understandings, and who, at the last great Assize, will assume our own Consciences into the Judicature

creature upon us, will ever sentence me for those Deductions, how horrid soever, which I never made mine, or that I shall ever find myself in Hell for a Misperuasion which I never entertained. But there are some whose Censures are not so artificial, yet no less severe, who beg their Postulata, and taking it for granted that such and such are the only sanctified Opinions, make them the *Shiboleth* by which to discriminate not only their own Friends, but God's too, lock up Heaven's Gates against any who bring not that Ticket for Admittance; and though they make the Way wide enough to receive the most over-grown Sinner of their own Opinion, yet they pronounce it impossible to the strictest Piety of a Dissenter. And upon such Grounds as these do we mutually doom one another to Perdition, never considering, that whilst we so briskly presage others Damnation, we really prepare for our own. Alas, our Eagerness to *heat the furnace seven times hotter, for all that bow not to our dictates*, does but expose us to the Fate of *Nebuchadnezzar's Officers, Dan. iii.* to be ourselves consumed in that Flame, wherein we cast them. It is indeed to be wished we would cease to invade God's Peculiar, by judging those that must stand or fall to him: But if we will needs take his Office, it is but equitable we take his Rules too, and in our Wrath remember Mercy: But God be blessed, it is the Judgment of our upright yet gracious Master that shall finally determine us, and not that of our passionate Fellow-servants: If these were irreversible, and the Key of the bottomless Pit were in our Custody, we might give Satan a Writ of Ease, discharge him from his Perambulations, he would need no more to walk about as a Lion, but might still lie in his Den, and we should bring in Prey enough to glut the Devourer: For could we execute all we condemn, we might ask the Disciples

Question,

Question, *Matth. xix. 25. Who then can be saved?* But as these severe Censures, are a present Violation of Charity; so they tend to the perpetuating it by obstructing a Return to that Unity of Judgment, which might make up the very original Breach; for while Men reciprocally load each other's Opinions and Persons with detestable Imputations, if they really speak what they think, they do still more deeply impress upon themselves the Prejudice to that which they accuse (Hatred as well as Love gathering Strength by being actuated); but if they do indeed not believe their own Charge, yet having once made it, either upon Interest or Passion, it is not probable they will want Pride to maintain it; and when we consider how ruling a Piece of Carnality that is, we cannot wonder if it indispose Men to Retractions. I wish we had not too many and too late Instances of some whose weightiest Objection against a Cause, has been their own former Violence against it. When Men have once fastened the Brand of Heresy, Profaneness or Blasphemy upon an Opinion, they think they cannot afterwards become its Profelytes, without either seeming to assume those Guilts, or at least that of having falsely charged them upon others: And the Horns of such a Dilemma do so gore their Reputation, that it often tempts to salve that with the wounding of Conscience, and persuades them rather to reject their Convictions, than expose their Credits. And certainly were this the only ill Consequent of our rigorous Accusations, it would be enough to prejudice them as unfit Instruments in a Gospel-design; but though they suit not with that Work to which they solemnly pretend, they are most accommodate to that they really produce: For if we examine, in the third Place, what Influence these our eager Contests have upon our Actions, we shall find them fully

fully proportionable to our Words. And, first, negatively, it is apparent in too many, that they are apt to confine even the common Offices of Humanity to their own Sect; and others, who do not so, yet shew so great Partiality in dispensing them, as discovers the Name of *Christian*, is not half so charming, as that of their own particular Faction. Were Instances of this kind as needful as they are numerous, it were easy to give Multitudes: But I think none that has lived in our late Confusions can have wanted Occasions of observing it in others, at least, if not in himself. But, alas, Omissions are scarce worth our Notice, when there are so many positive Acts of Unkindness so visible among us: They know little of ancient, and less of modern Times, that are unacquainted with the mutual Persecutions which almost all Parties have alternately raised one against another among Christians: Confinements and Banishments, Gibbets and Flames, Weapons God knows much too carnal for a spiritual warfare, yet much more in Use than those St. Paul recommends to *Timothy*, Gentleness, and meek Instructing of Opposers, *2 Tim.* ii. 25, 26. And when it is considered, that those Opposers too were Heathens, it will be more than a little strange, that Severity should be allowable to Brethren, which was interdicted against Aliens. Is it an easier Crime to reject the entire Body of that Faith which was once delivered to the Saints, than to differ in the Explication of some one Branch of it? nay, perhaps, only of some Corollary and Deduction from which, as far as it is human, may be fallible, and therefore can no more command my Assent, than it satisfies my Judgment; yet this is generally the most that can be affirmed of our Differences; and almost what Party is there which doth not proudly own all that Faith which constituted the first



first Christians? Would God we did as uniformly embrace the Charity too; and then most of our Diffutes would be superseded, at least so calmed, that there should be none of those destructive Effects which they now produce: For, alas, how many funeral Piles has this preposterous Zeal kindled? So that what some said of *Draco's* Laws, may too justly be applied to our Arguments, that they have been writ rather in Blood than Ink. But as Christ, when he forewarned his Disciples of the ensuing Persecution, tells them, not only they shall be killed, but they shall be put out of the Synagogue: So now, as if Christians were emulous of every Branch of *Jewish* Cruelty, we transcribe that Part of the Copy too, and either by causeless excommunicating others, or separating ourselves, we deny the Benefit of publick Communion to each other: And this is a greater Severity than the former, by how much more implacable our Hate is against what we count Error, than what we know to be Vice, and by how much the Concerns of the Soul are more estimable than those of the Body. The Inveterateness of those Feuds which rise from Opinion, may clearly be discovered in this Instance: Let a Man have committed all the Outrages which may render him unworthy to live, yet when we prosecute him to Death, we willingly afford him all Helps towards his future State, and no Man is so inhumane as to refuse to pray either for or with a Malefactor; yet some few speculative Differences are such a Gulph betwixt us, that we cannot meet even in that we all acknowledge our common Duty, *the Worship of our God*. Certainly, among all the accursed Issues of our Contention, there is none more malignant and criminal than this of Schism and Separation, and would Men judge dispassionately, more irrational too: For doubtless, were our Case stated to

Ch  
to a  
gues  
van  
Go  
and  
For  
noug  
we b  
to us  
Sure  
Divi  
whic  
and li  
crying  
the So  
know  
cession  
had w  
have f  
we co  
those  
Separa  
of the  
ty-seve  
Church  
suppl  
not to p  
many w  
cible in  
the Tea  
of the p  
Kindnes  
Charity,  
Pattern,  
lice and  
port wit  
should ha

any sober Heathen, he would never be able to  
 confess, why they who equally acknowledge the Ad-  
 vantage and Necessity of Prayer, confess the same  
 God, have the same common Wants in this World,  
 and Hopes in the next, may not ask in the same  
 Form, and in the same Place. Alas, is it not en-  
 ough to be at Distance where we differ, but must  
 be so also where we agree? Is Unity so dreadful  
 to us, that we must act Contradictions to escape it?  
 Surely this is a stranger Fascination of the Spirit of  
 Division, than that in the Gospel Demoniack,  
 which enabled him to break all Bonds in sunder,  
 and like it, abhors the Approaches of a Saviour,  
 crying out, *What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus  
 the Son of God, art thou come to torment us?* Who  
 knows what a powerful Exorcism the united Inter-  
 cessions of the Christian World might have been;  
 and we jointly deprecated our Quarrels, God might  
 have found a way to have composed them, though  
 we could not; and our Tears might have cemented  
 those Breaches which our Dissents made, but our  
 Separation widens. I know the venerable Names  
 of the Sanctions of Holy Church, the hundred thir-  
 ty-seventh Canon of the Code of the universal  
 Church, which says in express Terms, *Οτι ου δε-  
 ξαμεν ομιλουντας η συνηλθοντας ομοθυμαδον*, that we ought  
 not to pray with Hereticks or Schismatics, and very  
 many warm Expressions of the Fathers are produ-  
 cible in this Case: But till we excommunicate with  
 the Tears and Sorrows, and publick Concernment  
 of the primitive Christians, who refused all Acts of  
 Kindness only out of Love, and the most ardent  
 Charity, we may by no means lay claim to their  
 pattern, whose Estrangements only flow from Ma-  
 lice and inveterate Hate. Would we indeed com-  
 fort with the Example of those happy Times, we  
 could have feared the Guilt of Schism in ourselves  
 so

so much, as not to have lightly charged it upon others; we should have prayed for the Conversion of Dissenters, not laid Anathemas upon them, and prayed for their Confusion. St. Paul, we see, *Heb. x. 25.* reckons the *forsaking of assemblies*, as a Degree, at least, preparative of Apostasy; and from his Time, throughout all the purer Ages of the Church, the holy Fathers have generally branded it as the highest Impiety; and no marvel, for it is one of those Giant-like Sins, which not only oppresses Men, but invades even God himself. It is the mangling and assassinating that Body to which Christ owns an inseparable Connexion, the putting him to head scattered Limbs, instead of an entire compact Body, as if we meant to refute St. Paul, shew him it is possible that *Christ may be divided*. Good God! What shall we say when we see Heathen Soldiers estimate Christ's Coat higher than Christians do his Body? They thought the one too good to be parted, but we cease not to tear and mangle the other, and which is yet more monstrous, make it a Part of our Religion to do so. We name our Opinions our Faith, and when under that Title we have enshrined them, we make more barbarous Immolations than ever the most savage Heathens did. They sacrifice some few Objects of their Love, their Children, but we sacrifice the very Affection, and think our Zeal lukewarm till it have reduced our Charity to Ashes. And now, if we compare these our Divisions, Wrath and Bitterness, with those fundamental Gospel-precepts of Unity, Love and Meekness, we must surely say, we have not there so learned Christ. And then how ridiculous is it, to pretend a Zeal to that Gospel, whose very Foundations we undermine? Peace is at once the Blessing and Duty of Christians, and those Heats of speculative Contests which violate it, will certainly never serve to make

I.  
th  
wa  
are  
Co  
high  
de  
ver  
Zea  
Com  
prop  
indee  
than  
becau  
plain  
being  
abettin  
cessary  
import  
of the  
most e  
Vol

Chap. XI. *as they engage upon ill Arts.* 253

us either good or happy. And therefore, till Charity cease to be an essential Part of Christianity (which certainly we must burn our Bibles ere we can suppose) we must conclude, that our Disputes, and the Ways whereby we manage them, how much soever they pretend to preserve, do indeed evacuate and destroy true, that is, practick Christianity.

CHAP. XI.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from Disputes, as they engage upon ill Arts and scandalous Practices, to sustain the espoused Cause and Party.*

I. **A**ND yet so unhappily are many Men mistaken, that these irregular Heats which thus waste the vital Spirits of Religion, are thought the most sovereign Cordials to support them. The highest Paroxysm of this Fever is deemed the perfectest Health. Men esteem the overflowing of their Gall, the Exuberance of their Zeal; and then all the Promises to the faithful Combatant in Christ's Camp, they confidently appropriate to that their so eminent Grace; though, indeed, it can with no more Propriety be called so, than *Pharaoh's* lean Kine might be said to be fat, because they had devoured those that were so. In plain Terms, Men lay so great Weight upon their being of right Opinions, and their Eagerness of abetting them, that they account that the *unum necessarium*, and think the propagating of those so important a Service to God, as will justify the Use of the most interdicted Instruments, legitimate the most enormous Commissions, that they can fancy

*Peoples Zeal  
puts them upon  
ill Practices to  
promote their  
Opinions;*



contributive to that pious End : And moreover commute for the Neglect of practick Duties in the general Tract of their Lives. I shall not here urge the Hazard of Mens erring in the Choice of Opinions, nay, the Certainty that of many opposite one only can be the right ; and then to all such as miss that, their very Ground-work fails them. I shall only confine myself to the malignant Influence this Persuasion has on Practice, and in that Respect I cannot but affirm it a most pernicious Delusion, which, as it tends extremely to the enhancing the Bitterness of our Contests, so it may justly be reckoned among the worst Effects of them, and is a most irrefragable Proof how much they obstruct the vital Efficacy of Religion in our Hearts. Nor is it any new Thing for Men thus to deceive themselves ; for we find such Confidences as these frequently upbraided to the *Jews*, both by the Prophets and Christ himself ; they thought their Zeal to the Temple and ritual Observances so invincibly meritorious, as no Crime could defeat, and that their legal Purifications would render them acceptable in God's Eyes, in spite of all their moral Pollutions : But how fallacious a Hope this was, the many severe Increpations of God do sufficiently attest. Yet certainly their Guilt was far below ours ; the Things they so depended on were Parts, though not the Whole of their Duty ; those Ordinances, tho' perhaps somewhat adulterated by Rabbinical Mixtures, yet, for the main, were instituted by God himself, and that with a Design of discriminating and separating them from the rest of the World ; and such Peculiarities and Privileges as these, might have an Aptness to excite that Presumption : But, alas, the Case is otherwise with most of us ; they are not the Revelations of God's Will, not the Testament of our dying Redeemer, but some Codicils

eils and Annexes of our own we so earnestly abet.  
 It is not the Text (for then it were impossible for  
 any that received the same Canon of Scripture to  
 differ) but our Glosses, to which we pay such Re-  
 verence; and when on that Account we sever our-  
 selves from those to whom the Commands of God,  
 the Blood of our Saviour have most closely united  
 and cemented us, we can yet make a Shift to think  
 that there is so much of sacred in this, as shall not  
 only render it highly rewardable, but also hallow all  
 other Profanations of our Lives; and in our *Jehu*-  
 March upon such an Expedition, can turn all Re-  
 grets of Conscience (like *Joram's* Messengers) be-  
 hind us. That this is so, none can doubt who ob-  
 serve with what Boldness Men rush upon the most  
 unchristian Sins, in pursuit of what they fancy a  
 Christian Cause. Were it not for this Amulet, how  
 were it possible for any to think they may venture  
 upon Perjury, Sacrilege, Murder, Regicide, any  
 thing, without Impeachment to their Saintship;  
 nay, to think that the only Danger lies on the o-  
 ther Side, in being remissly wicked, that to slack any  
 thing of the utmost Speed, is *to do the work of the*  
*Lord negligently*. Yet that this has been a prevail-  
 ing Persuasion, we have had too many and too sad  
 Instances; and God grant we may not find them so  
 repeated, that our Sense may supersede the Use of  
 our Memories concerning them; nor has this been  
 peculiar to one only Sect; but those who are other-  
 wise at the widest Distance unite in this Principle.  
 They are not only Fanaticks that can say Grace  
 over the foulest Crimes, and consecrate them to the  
 Use of a good Cause; if we examine the Dypticks,  
 either of Conclave or Consistory, we shall find some  
 Saints upon that Account, who could never have  
 been so upon any other. And when we consider  
 how often Heaven has been mortgaged to gain Aux-

liaries from Hell, how many have been encouraged to the most damning Sins, by Promises of being certainly saved; we must either think that a holy Cause is omnipotent enough to reverse God's Decrees, to save whom he would damn, or else that this Pretence is one of the most ruinous Deceits, the most fatal Treachery to Souls that ever Satan contrived, who, though he do in all Instances play the Mountebank, yet sure never more than when on Confidence of this Antidote he persuades us thus to swallow down his deadliest Poison.

2. I must not here attempt to  
 1. *Upon Defamation of Mens Persons, and perverting their Writings:* enumerate all the unchristian Practices, that have on this Score been made, not only lawful but meritorious; yet there it one of so frequent Use, that I must needs advert unto it, and that is, those

Calumnies and Falshoods, which are now become a Piece of Ecclesiastick as well as State Policy, and a great Part of that offensive Armour wherewith our Controvertists assault one another. Indeed if we consider how many Forges are daily going for these Engines, we shall have Reason to think all Parties have an high Esteem of their Usefulness. Of these Calumnies there are too many Sorts and Degrees to be here particularized: And indeed those, who permit themselves to use any, can be supposed to have no other Boundaries than the Advantage of their Cause: And accordingly, as that seems to exact, they lay their Scene; sometimes they traduce the Persons of their Opposers, and by raising Prejudices against them, hope some of it will reflect upon their Doctrine: Did Men generally know how to distinguish between Reports and Certainties, this Stratagem would be as unskilful as it is uningenuous: But considering the vulgar Temper, it is not unaptly suited

suited to it. This, it seems, was anciently understood, it being the old *Greek* Advice, *ῥαπὴν ἄν-  
τις καὶ δακνὴν ταῖς διαβολαῖς, οὐ καὶ θεραπεύει  
τοῦ ἐλκὸς ἢ διδύμενον*, *ηὲν μένει τὸ διαβολῆς*.  
*To calumniate stoutly, for that, how perfectly soever  
the Wound of Reproach be healed, there will remain  
a Scar; and though we wipe away with never so  
much Care the Dirt thrown at us, there will be left  
some Sullage behind.* And accordingly this was the  
Expedient the Pagans used against the primitive  
Christians, to put them thus in the Skins of Beasts,  
and Shapes of Monsters, and then worry them to  
Death; and this is the Method still, tho' heightened  
and improved; and our Religion has suffered infi-  
nitely more since we used it against each other,  
than when they managed it against the whole Com-  
munity. But besides this Defamation of Persons,  
another Branch of this black Art is the depraving  
of Writings, both in the Sense and very Letter,  
and direct Words; for the former of these, whoso-  
ever observes the strange Perversions, and affected  
Mistakes of Mens Meanings, visible in many of our  
Polemick Discourses, will sure resolve that a Man's  
Intentions, as well as his Words and Actions, may  
be calumniated: Nor does the Letter escape better,  
every Period which threatens Danger to the Cause  
must be mutilated and dismembered, and as *Samson*  
was by the *Philistines*, lose its Hair and Eyes, and  
then be made Sport for the whole Party. And I  
fear there are too few, who do not, in this Case,  
take the *Jewish* Reparation, an eye for an eye, &c.  
retaliate to the Adversary the foul Play they re-  
ceive. But some advance yet higher, and think it  
not enough to make an Argument or Testimony use-  
less to the Enemy, unless they draw it over to  
themselves, make it betray the Side it was to main-  
tain, and as a Conqueror uses to restore Arms to



such of the adverse Party as will turn to his, so after they have by Satisfaction secured themselves of its Aid, it shall then be made as potent as is possible; and with such kind of Renegado Troops as these, some Causes have been much supported. Yet were this Violation offered only to the Writings of living Men, who might vindicate it, it were not so transcendently ignoble, but it most frequently falls upon those, who have made their Beds in the Dust, who have changed their own Form, and cannot secure their Writings from the same Fate: Nay, it is yet more frequently those, whom we have all Reason to suppose, and most of us profess to believe, glorified Saints; and this superadds a daring Presumption to all other Circumstances of the Guilt, and heightens an Injustice into Sacrilege. It has always been held the most detestable sort of Forgery to counterfeit Testaments, though the Testator were of never so low a Quality, or his Bequests of never so mean a Value; and shall it now pass for a Piece of commendable Dexterity, and Art of Manage, to falsify those Writings by which the Fathers of the Church designed to entail Truth and Piety, not Strife and Faction upon her? We know, Necromancy has justly been reputed one of the most horrid Forms of Sorcery, because it enforced dead Men to speak what the living were inquisitive to hear. I leave it to be considered what this wants of that, besides the dreadful Ceremonies of the Incantation; certainly it is a Guilt which nothing but our too familiar Acquaintance with it could make unformidable. And indeed this whole Method of serving a Cause by such sinister Means, is so utterly repugnant to the Principles even of ingenuous Nature, that we can scarce cast a greater Scandal upon an Opinion, than to shew it needs such Aids. It is by Historians branded as an execrable Fact in him, who, to secure  
himself

himself from a neighbouring Prince, called the *Turk* into Christendom: But sure those who, to fortify their Side, have brought in this Artifice of calumniating and falsifying, have done an Act no less impious, the Constitution of Christianity agreeing full as well with the *Alcoran* as with these *piæ fraudes*, as some of them who perhaps mean the Fraud more than the Piety are pleased to call them. Nay, indeed they accord not much better with Philosophy than Divinity, every Man knows the Nature of Contraries is to combat and expel, not to cherish and support one another. How absurd is it then for those, who say they design to advance Truth, to make Falshood their Instrument? I wish they would experiment to accommodate their secular Concerns at the same Rate, let them cool them in the Fire, warm them in the Frost, and feed themselves by perpetual Fasting, and when they find Cause to commend the Efficacy of that Method, they may, with fairer Pretence, in this higher Instance, reconcile the Fends of Reason and of Nature, and make a Lie the Evidence of Truth. In the interim, it may well pass for Sophistry as well as Sin; and doubtless, whatever Advantages are hoped for to private Sects and Parties by this Art, Christian Religion, in general, is hugely prejudiced by it: For when Men shall compare the Veracity of Heathens with our Falshoods, learn from Historians, that among the *Persians*, *αρχισον το ψευδους* *veropisai*, to lie was deemed a Fault of the greatest Turpitude, and they therefore laid an ill Character upon Persons in Debt, *οτι αναγκη ε οφειλοντα η το ψευδος λεγειν*, because he that is so must needs tell Lies: And when they shall see in the Laws of *Gingis*, a barbarous *Tartar*, Lying made a capital Crime, and yet among Christian Casuists made a holy Artifice, they will be tempted to think our End as fictitious

as our Way; and that our Religion has little Countenance from Truth, which is thus fain to make Lies its Refuge. Thus unhappily do these Arrows revert, not only on those who shoot them, but in the Face of Christianity itself, which is defamed and traduced by those Slanders we aim at our private Adversaries.

2. Upon evacuating the Law, and making void the Precepts of the Gospel:

3. But besides this direct, there are other more oblique Ways of making Vice subservient to Religion, or to speak more properly, of making Religion subservient to Vice; for some Zealots of several Parties, who more regard the Numberousness than Purity of their Professors, discerning how much the sensual Part of Mankind startles at the Strictness of Gospel-precepts, are industrious to take off that Discouragement, not by convincing them of the real divine Sweetness and Pleasantness of them, but by debasing and accommodating them more to the carnal Appetite: Yet here Men proceed not all alike, some use Christ's Yoke, as *Hananiah* did that of *Jeremy*, break it quite off; others only essay to slacken and alleviate, that it may not pinch the Lusts of libertine Profelytes: Of the first sort are such, as having made the Adherence to their Party the infallible Mark of Sanctification, and that Sanctification of Election, do from thence proclaim, to all who are so qualified, a general Jubilee and Manumission from the Bond even of Christ's as well as *Moses's* Law, or if some of them allow it to remain an impotent Director, yet while they affirm that God sees no Sin in his Elect, or if he do, beholds them as a Father does the harmless Falls of his Child, rather with Smiles than Anger, they make the Violations of it so safe, that they are too sure to be many, and between abrogating and thus enervating

enervating a Law, the Difference is merely verbal.

4. Of the second sort are some, who by indulgent and partial Glosses seek to mollify the Severity of Christ's Commands; that contrive for their Clients not the Means of obeying, but the Arts of escaping them. Like the unjust Steward, teach their Lord's Debtors to *write fifty instead of a hundred*; and decide Cases of Conscience more according to the Interests and Passions of Men than the Will of Christ. There are a Generation of Men, of whose Dexterity in this Faculty the World has taken so much Notice that I need not name them, a sort of easy Casuists, who seem to have erected a Court of Equity to relieve Men against the Rigour of divine Law; and there is little Doubt but they shall find enough ready to make such Appeals: Men love to be Christians as cheap as they can, and therefore will close with that Party which offers the easiest Terms: And then, while these spiritual Pioneers do thus enlarge the narrow Way, make it a Road as well for the Beast as the Man, the brutish sensual, as well as rational divine Part of us, no Wonder tho' Sholes of Converts throng in to them. But it is to be considered, that all this while this is winning Profelytes to themselves, not to God, the gaining them to a Sect, not a Religion; at least, not to that pure Religion and undefiled, which the grand Author of our Faith has both exemplified and proposed to us; for how much that suffers by this Way of propugning private Opinions, is more than enough apparent. Yet so ambitious are our prime Leaders of such Trophies, that, in order to them, some are said to ascend yet a Step higher, and besides this general Encouragement they give to Mens Lusts, by  
taking

3. *Upon slackening the Severity of its Commands.*



taking off Restraints, do, in some Cases, actually promote and excite them. For when they see a licentious Person, whose Acquitt they judge beneficial to their Cause, they have Artifices of fomenting his Riots, do not only take off the Bridle, but use the Spur also, hoping, that at the Rebound it may conduce to their End. If any think it impossible it should do so, let them consider, that among our various Opinions some there are which sell Heaven much cheaper than others dare, that allow such easy Atonements as the most habitual Sinner need not despair of: And then the most infallible Means to ascertain such to that Side, is to make them too bad for any other. For when a Man is resolute to keep his Sins while he lives, and yet unwilling to relinquish all Hopes when he dies, it is more than probable he will embrace that Profession which bids fairest to the reconciling those so distant Interests; and therefore the greater Malefactor he is, the more sure he will be *to fly to the horns of this altar*; the nearer sinking, the apter to catch at these Reeds; so that the Project is not unpolitick, though God knows so impious, that it is much fitter for the School of *Machiavel* than of Christ; and seems to verify that Imputation as to a Part of Christians, which *Julian* once as falsely as maliciously affixed upon the whole, that *their Church was an Asylum and Sanctuary for the most flagitious Offenders, and protected those Guiltless to which no other Religion allowed any Expiation*. It is indeed so horrid that I cannot think there are many Consciences so cauterized by this fiery Zeal as to admit it, yet that some have done it, there is too much Certainty, and therefore it is no improper Instance, in our present Argument; for if Mens Eagerness to support their several Sides, can transport them to such Attempts as these, it is abundant Evidence how much Christi-

anity

anity loses by these Contests of Under-factions, which, while they pretend to guard, do indeed invade her under her own Colours.

5. But besides the Faults Men commit with this immediate avowed Aspect upon their Religion, there are others which slyly shrowd themselves under the Skirt of its Mantle; I mean those Sins of common-Life, which though they pretend not to advance the Cause, yet, when acted by a Zealot, are thought to be overwhelmed by his heroick Piety. Indeed Men who make themselves so much Work about others Faith, are seldom at leisure to regulate their own Practice, and so have no Way of stating their Accounts with God, but by balancing the Excess of the one against the Defects of the other: How such Reckonings will pass the grand Audit, it is, I think, not hard to divine; but, in the interim, it keeps them very chearful and secure, teaches them a Receipt to retain all their Sins, and yet lose none of their Confidence; so that when they have immersed themselves in all Filthiness both of Flesh and Spirit, they can trust their Zeal to refine them from all that Dross. Nor does it only thus reconcile them to their own Vices, but to other Mens also, whose most brutish Sensualities they can look on with perfect Patience, nay even Atheism itself can have fair Quarter: They are not much discomposed to see Men have no Religion, it is only the having one different from their own that awakes their Indignation; then, like *Saul*, when seized on by the evil Spirit, they cast about their Javelins, think no Rigour too great on such a Provocation; yet even here they have Intervals, and the very same Persons who are thus at odds upon a religious, can unite

*Some think that  
their great  
Zeal will com-  
mune and make  
Amends for  
their greater  
Wickedness.*

unite upon a vicious Account. Those who mutually denounce Damnation to each other, can, with full Accord, combine in those Practices which will ascertain it to them both, as if they so much feared to have their Predictions defeated, that they would be each other's Convoy to the Land of Darkeness. Those that will by no means meet at the Church, know not when to part at the Tavern, and though they will not jointly partake of the Cup of the Lord, are yet very sociable at the Cup of Devils; I mean those excessive Debauches which are a most acceptable Drink-offering to those infernal Spirits. Have we not seen many whose distant Opinions have fastened upon one another the Brand of Antichristianism, who have yet, like *Gog* and *Mageg*, joined against the holy City? And those who could never agree on the Way of setting up Christ's Throne, have yet been very unanimous in pulling down the King's. Thus, alas, do we jostle one another out of the narrow Path that leads to Life, but can hand in hand run our Career in the broad Way of Destruction. And, doubtless, this great Unevenness, these spiritual Feuds, and carnal Endearments between the same Persons; this impetuous Zeal, and as impetuous Lusts in the same Breasts, could never be, did not Men depend so confidently on the one, as to think it will commute, and satisfy for the other. But, alas, how groundless a Presumption this is, the whole Tenor of the Gospel does abundantly witness. In all that grand Charter where is there the least Clause importing such an Immunity? I am sure there are Multitudes that assert the contrary. Indeed, the whole Frame of the evangelical Covenant is totally against it; that requiring an entire uniform Sanctity, and allowing no other Privilege to the Sins of the most knowing Professors, but a Preheminence in Punishment, the being beaten

beaten with many Stripes. And when it is considered, that the End of all Religion is but the drawing us to a Conformity with God, the impressing on us some Character of his eternal Goodness and Holiness, it will be as absurd as impious to believe that our Zeal to any Religion can absolve us from that Purity which is the End and Design of all. And while this is the Way Men take to approve their Piety, it is no Marvel to find so many Christians, and so little Christianity in the World: For that is not to be estimated by the Number of its Professors, but by their Obedience to its Rules, and he that gives up his Name to it and not his Heart, will receive as little Advantage by it, as he brings Honour to it, and how little that is in respect of its internal Efficacy, is, I presume, competently evidenced.

6. But that we may more thoroughly discern how universally destructive our Wranglings are to it, in all its Concerns, let us a little examine whether they do not endamage it, even in respect of outward Profession also. This may seem a strange Query to those who

*Our Divisions  
are prejudicial  
to the Progress  
of the Gospel,  
by hindering  
the Conversion  
of its Enemies.*

think their Disputes about Religion are to denominate them the great Confessors of the Age; yet certainly there is but too much Ground not only for the Enquiry, but to resolve it in the Affirmative. And if it prove so, it will infer but sadly to those who, having laid the whole Stress of their Hopes upon their Zeal to advance their Faith, will be found to have pulled down more than they have built up. Now Christianity may, in respect of Profession, decay two Ways, either in its Hopes, or in its Possession, the one in relation to Aliens, the other to Disciples. The first by hin-

dering



dering the Access of new Converts, the second by staggering or alienating the old, and both these Ways she visibly appears to suffer by our Divisions. And first, if we consult but our Experience, if we trust but our own Observations, we cannot but confess, that the Gospel has long been at a great Stand; that that Sun, which at its first arising was like *David's*, *Psal.* xix. surrounded the World in a vigorous efficacious Motion, is since become like *Joshua's*, *Josh.* x. 12. arrested in its Course; nay, like *Hezekiah's*, gone backward, *Isa.* xxxviii. 8. *Mahometism* (if not *Paganism*) having long taken up its Seat in divers of the most flourishing Apostolick Plantations. A sad Change, that from the daily and numerous Accession of the first Times, it should now become a kind of Prodigy, a Piece of News, scarce heard in an Age, that one single Profelyte is gained to the Church; yet that thus it is, is too obvious to be denied: And, truly, it is not much less apparent that our Dissensions have, in a great Degree, contributed to it. For first, as to the Extirpation of the Eastern Churches, he that shall examine the Records of those Times, will have Cause to say, their Jangling and Divisions were not only in a moral or divine, but even in a proper natural Sense, the Instruments of it; the *Turk* only coming in at those Breaches which themselves had made: Nor had their Candlestick probably been removed, had they not first abused its Light, to the setting themselves in Combustion. That the same Cause has not yet had the same Effect among us, is owing not to its Unaptness to produce it, but to the admirable Patience and Mercy of God, who yet with-holds that fatal Judgment, which we do our Parts to pull upon ourselves, our mutual Violences against one another herein unhappily combining and making one united Force against us all. But though  
the

the divine Goodness hath hitherto so countermined our Treachery to ourselves, as not to suffer us to enjoy that State of Darkness we have so courted, yet certainly our Contentions are extremely accessory to the continuing it upon others, our many new and wandering Lights, however they fail of having that Property of the *pillar of fire*, *Exod. xiv.* of illuminating and conducting the *Israelites*, yet too much answer its other, in becoming Cloud and Darkness to the *Egyptians*, there being scarce any thing more apt to intercept the Beams of the Sun of Righteousness from the Heathen World, every of those little Inclosures our Factions have made in the Church, becoming a great Partition-wall to keep others out of it. This may be made evident in several Respects; as first, in relation to those many moral Obliquities in which our eager Disputes do (as hath already been shewed) betray us, which cannot but give so much Scandal to any considering Man, that we can scarce hope any can turn to us as to a better Religion, but will rather think it the Way to relinquish all; to obliterate those native Impressions of Piety and Honesty they brought with them into the World; so that if we expect any Proselytes, it must be only such as would live worse than mere Nature allows them.

7. But this, though as important a Consideration as can well be, I shall not here insist on, having, in the second Section, given some Instances how apt our Morality is to defame our Divinity, and confirm Men in Opposition to it. But though this be a great, yet it is not the only Means by which our Dissensions hinder the Progress of the Gospel, for they do not only make Infidels less inclinable to re-

*Our Differences at home make us backward in propagating the Gospel abroad amongst Infidels,*

ceive it, but us to propagate it. Those do so busy and engross us, that there is neither Leisure nor Heart left for this. Our activest Spirits are so engaged at home in asserting their private Quarrels, that all such foreign Designs are forgot. For as in Civil, so in Ecclesiastical Concerns, every one is more industrious to advance his peculiar Interest than that of the Community, accordingly we find innumerable Promulgers of every new Opinion. No Sect wants its Apostles to propagate and diffuse it; but where are there any that have the like Care for the main Root of Christian Religion, which they have for these little Twigs and Off-sets which they have planted in their own Gardens; how many Ages must we look back to find a Man that has made it his Business to convert Infidels to the Faith? It is true, indeed, there are some very magnificent Relations of modern Attempts this Way, of great Industry some have used to bring the most savage Nations to the Obedience of Christ: But, if we examine, it will be obvious, the main Design was to subject them to themselves. It was not so much their Heathenism as their Territories they invaded, and such Apostles as these are ill qualified to make St. Paul's Profession, *2 Cor. xii. 16. I seek not yours, but you.* And the Success of such Essays has been answerable to the Motive; they have won Riches, but not Souls. The Gospel in one Hand and a Sword in the other, has made many Slaves; but I fear few Christians. Indeed, what Encouragement had those poor Creatures to receive a Religion from their Oppressors? Why should they think that those who tortured and killed their Bodies, were really concerned to save their Souls? or that those who would not permit them to enjoy what was their own, meant to help them to any thing better? And while the Felicities of another  
World.

World were recommended to them only by such as had deprived them of all in this, we cannot wonder at their little Appetite to embrace them, or to find the oppressed *Indians* protest against that Heaven where the *Spaniards* are to be their Co-habitants. In short, this is sure such a Method of evangelizing, as too widely differs from that which first planted the Church, to be likely to advance its Growth: So that, notwithstanding all Pretences of this Kind, we may resume our Assertion, and conclude that our intestine Discords (perhaps not those alone) have diverted the Zeal of this more Christian Undertaking, and left a great Part of the World under that invincible Ignorance St. Paul mentions, *Rom. x. 14.* *How shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a Preacher?* And God knows whether we have not herein provided better for their Excuse than our own.

8. There is yet another Way by which our Divisions impede their Conversion, and that is, by giving them Prejudice to that Doctrine about which ourselves cannot agree. It is an universal Maxim, that *Truth is always consonant to itself*; and therefore, where they see so little Unity, they have too much Temptation to doubt of Truth. He that wandering should meet a Company that offer to conduct him to his Journey's End, might reasonably incline to deliver himself up to their Guidance; but if he find them unagreed upon the Way, one disputing for this, and another for that, and every one protesting against all but his own; he would sure retract his Confidence, and think they offered

*and doth prejudice them against those Doctrines we cannot ourselves agree upon,*



him only more Variety of Mistakes, resolve it as safe to trust himself to his own Errors as other Mens. And this, alas, seems to be too exact a Parallel of the present Case ; we Christians do so mutually damn one another, that a poor *Turk* or *Heathen* will think, he rather multiplies than ends his Danger by associating himself with us ; for there being so many Parties, whichsoever he joins himself to, there will be abundant Odds against him ; so that if he could be secured the Truth were among us, yet the great Difficulty of finding it out, would be a very disheartening Consideration. Besides, Men love, in Transactions of great Importance, to have as many and as credible Vouchers as may be, and upon that Score it will sure be but a cold Inducement to any to turn Christian, to foresee, that when he has done so, he shall be disowned by far the greater Part of that Number, and that at his Entrance into the Church, he shall be met with almost as many Anathemas, as when he was an Infidel. Nay, I scarce know whether I may call it an Entrance into the Church, or rather into a Convicticle, or particular Congregation, our Schisms and Separations having hardly left a Possibility of external Communion with the Universal Church, since the communicating with one Part of it, does infallibly excommunicate from another. Thus have we placed our flaming Sword (though God knows no Cherubim) at the Gate of our Paradise, and when God calls all Men to the Waters of Life, our Contentions have made them, like those of *Marah*, so bitter and unpleasant, as deters and averts Men from them ; which, as it is in the highest Degree injurious to them, so is it contumelious to him, whose Invitations are by this Means frustrated ; it is in some Degree the evacuating one of the main Purposes of Christ's coming into the World, which was

to,

to call men out of darkness into his marvellous light ; and as he was thus sent by his Father, so also were the Apostles solemnly commissioned by him to preach to the Gentile World, who, with indefatigable Industry and resolute Sufferings, pursued the Charge ; and sure this is competent Evidence, that the Design was of the greatest and most weighty Importance, and such as can never be out-dated, till there cease to be Objects of it, Unbelievers to convert : And by that let us measure the Guilt of obstructing it, which, if we would impartially do, I assure myself the most passionate Bigot of any Party must confess, that it infinitely outweighs all the Piety his Doctrine can pretend to, that his peculiar Church gains not so much as the Catholick loses ; and that how confidently soever he hath canonized his Quarrels, they are indeed but the worst sort of Heathens, and serve to keep out the better. Yet besides the Mis-  
chief, they do in relation to those that are without, they are extremely pernicious to those that are within, and that not only to some one Sect, but like an universal Poison, that is equally deadly to the most contrary Complexions, they operate on the most distant Ranks of Professors, the tender and the obdurate, the scrupulous and the profane. And first, for the tender, tremulous Christian, it is easy to discern how much he must be distracted and amazed by them ; for while he hears each Sect thunder out Damnation against each other, he cannot but be startled at the Danger of adhering to the wrong ; and though that may a while excite his Diligence to discover the right, yet when he comes to that Inquisition, he will meet with so many polemick Intricacies to intangle him, that after many Turns, first to one Side, and then to another, he  
will

*and stagger the Faith of its old Professors,*

will be apt to think the only Clue to extricate him out of this Labyrinth of many Religions, is to abandon all. Nor is this mere Speculation and Conjecture; God knows we have had successively, thro' the whole Round of Error, too many practick Experiments of it. Several Persons there have been, whose Zeal to find out Truth, by an unhappy Rule of False, directed them to allow of every Error; while, like sick Men, who desire to die good-cheap, they put themselves into the Hands of any Emptyrick, follow each bold Pretender that has the Impudence to talk of Truth, till Superstition ends in Profanation, Godliness proves Atheism, and by having been of many Sects, at last have no Religion. And surely this is a most unhappy Effect of our Discords, thus to be Stumbling-blocks in our Brother's Way, and when we remember the Woes pronounced against those that shall scandalize any of the little ones, it will be strange how Men can think to approve their Christianity, by the Ruin of their Brother's, or secure themselves of Heaven by keeping others thence: For though Christ tells his Disciples there should be some that should think it a Service to God to kill their Bodies, yet to fancy the destroying of Souls so too, is a Deception of which we have neither Record nor Prediction in holy Writ, and is a Superfoetation of the Spirit of Delusion, peculiar to those who have placed their own Sanctity in these religious Wranglings; which serve to destroy it in other Men. And

*and tempts bad Men to doubt of, and bid Defiance to all Religion.* as they thus serve on the one Side to shipwreck the Faith of these weak unstable Souls; so do they, on the other, advance the Impiety of the daring Sinner; for as they are Temptation to the one, so are they Presence and Excuse to the other, to bid Defiance to all

all Religion. He whose dissolute Affections have so long been courting his Understanding to turn Atheist, will sure not lose the Advantage of so plausible an Argument as our Divisions afford him; and since his Lusts engage him in an irreconcilable War against the practick Part of Piety, he will most gladly embrace this Occasion of Quarrel against the Theory also; so making himself entire, and extinguishing those uneasy Regrets and Misgivings arising from the Repugnancy of his Life to his Belief. It were not hard to give a Compendium of these Mens Logic, and draw out those Schemes of Discourse, by which, from our Differences in Religion, they infer the Discarding of all. But I fear these are already too well known, and where they are not, I should be loth to be any Man's Instructor. This is, I am sure, too palpable, that how fallacious soever these Reasonings are, they have been very operative, as appears by the Number of those avowed Atheists among us, who placing themselves in the Seat of the Scorners, give themselves much pleasing Divertisement, by deriding our eager Scuffles about that which they think nothing. If any Man thinks that the Church is no Loser by the Defection of such Libertines, I must be allowed to dissent from him: For, first, there are Examples of the most vicious Persons that have been reduced, and while they retain their Christian Belief, that lays such undeniable Obligations to good Life, that whenever they resume their Reason, they must take up Virtue also with it; so that there is an equal Possibility of their being good that there is of their being rational: But when all Hope and Fear of a future Estate is disclaimed, when those Cords are broken, which should pull them up from the Dungeon, then, and not before, is their State visibly desperate. But besides this Possibility of recovering them, the Danger of  
losing



losing others is to be considered. Bold Atheism is like a raging Pestilence, which taints the very Air, so that those impious Discourings, which are the Effects of some Mens Vices, may be the Cause of others; and we too often see, that those who ascended themselves by Degrees, do, in an instant, advance their Profelytes to the Height of Irreligion, as appears by the strange Proficiency of some, whose Years allow them not to have arrived to it otherwise than *per saltum*. And sure this spreading Contagion has been so destructive to the Church, that it were to be wished, the mere titular Christians had rather remained such, than thus to have averted others from being so much.

*In propagating our particular Sects and Opinions, we expose Christianity in general.*

9. And now, if all these Scandals be worth our Regret, if the emboldening and exasperating the Bad, the corrupting the Innocent, and the Decay of Christian Profession consequent to both, be formidable Evils, we know where to charge the Guilt. Our Contentions must be arraigned as Accessaries if not Principals in the Case: And then sure it will besit our angry Zealots to consider, whether this be the Way of advancing God's Truth, or what account they will give to the Lord of the Vineyard, who, while they pretend to dress and prune the Branches, do thus debilitate and destroy the Roots. Nay, indeed, in this they are treacherous even to their own Pretensions; for all those several Religions, which they so tenderly cherish, have no proper Root of their own, but, like Excrescencies, spring out of the main Stock of Christianity, live by its Juice and Moisture, and, consequently, can never hope to survive it. And then, certainly, there can be nothing more ridiculous, than to express their Kindness to the one, by

by Ways that are so ruinous to the other. It is as if a Passenger in a Ship should, to fortify his private Cabin, tear up the Planks, and expose the whole Vessel to sinking; yet thus preposterously do many of our chief Pilots apply their Care. In the mean time, it cannot but be a very delightful Prospect to the grand Enemy of Souls, to see us thus busily promote his Interest, lay Snares for ourselves, and by our own Folly do that which all his Subtilties could never compass. Nor can we think but he will be as officious to us as is possible, while we are thus employed, will help us to contrive our Turrets, whilst he sees we pluck our Stones from the Foundation to build them with; nor shall we ever want new Models of Churches, so long as they thus help to destroy the old; and how aptly they are fitted for that Purpose, needs (I suppose) no farther Demonstration.

---

C H A P. XII.

*A Survey of the Mischiefs arising from Disputes,  
in reference to civil Peace.*

I. **A**ND now sure we cannot but conclude our Contentions highly injurious to Christianity, that thus assault it both in the Practick and Theory: And indeed how fierce soever our Quarrels are with one another, the heaviest Blows are sure to fall on that, which as in its Constitution is of the most pacifick Temper imaginable, so it has the common Fate of Reconcilers to suffer from all Parties. But godliness having the promise as well of this life as of that which is to come, it often happens, that

*Our Contentions  
are very injuri-  
ous to our civil  
Peace:*

that there is such a Consent between our spiritual and secular Concerns, that the Mischiefs that oppress the one do reflect on the other: And indeed Religion, when entire and united, is one of the best Bonds of civil as well as ecclesiastical Peace, (as even those attest, who defying all other Ends of it, do yet admit it a useful State-engine) from whence it is consequent, that the Distractions and Divisions in that, must have proportionably a contrary Influence, and infect Communities with Discord, Tumult and Disorders. And this is an Effect with which I think not unfit to bring up the Rear of the foregoing Mischiefs, it being not so purely secular as not to suit our present Subject; for outward Order and Unity can never be so innocently disturbed, but that Christianity must be wounded in it also; and besides, it may perhaps obtain more Consideration than the former, as being of a Nature wherein the Generality of Men will think themselves the most concerned; for though there be many that can look on the Ruin both of Christian Practice and Profession, with *Gallio's* Indifference, *Acts* xviii. 17. and care for none of those Things, yet when the Siege draws closer, when they find themselves begirt in their worldly Interests, and that the same Deluge, that overwhelms Churches, may bear down Palaces also, perhaps they may think the Matter not so contemptible. And, first, as to the Truth of the Observation, the World has too long groaned under the Experiment to need farther Proof. That Bitterness which first tainted the Waters of the Sanctuary, hath from thence diffused itself into our common Streams, and, like the *Egyptian* Plague, left none uncorrupted: For, whether we look upon Families, Neighbourhoods, Kingdoms, any the least, or any the greatest Societies, we find the miserable Trophies of our holy Wars, in Factions and Confusions;

fusions, I would I could not say,  
 Rapine and Blood also. For the first of these, the domestick Jars caused by different Opinions, the

1. *They disturb  
 the Peace of  
 Families :*

Instances are numerous, or rather innumerable, which our own Age and Nation afford us. How many Servants have, on this Score, been at Defiance with their Masters ? Children with their Parents ? nay, Wives with their Husbands ? Such an unhappy Force is there in mistaken Zeal, that it dissolves the closest Bonds, violates all Obligations natural or civil, while, under Pretence of Service to God, like the Pharisees Corban, it evacuates all Duty to Man ; and this has made such Ruptures and Divisions in Families, that that delightful Prospect the Psalmist so much commends, that of *brethrens dwelling together in unity*, Psalm cxxxiii. is scarce any where to be met with ; but, instead of that, such Rancour and Bitterness, Treachery and Malice, as if Men either mistook Christ's Prediction, Luke xii. 52. for a Precept, or at least were willing to advance his prophetick Office upon the Ruin of his kingly, and to verify his Presage by breaking his Command. And as the Oeconomical Order and Peace is thus disturbed, so if he that misses Quiet at home should seek for it abroad, he will soon find himself disappointed, and discern that, as the Societies grow greater, so do the Disorders also, and that private Strifes do as much combine to make Parties and Factions, as Families do to make Cities and Corporations. By this Means, that mutual Communication, by which the Members of civil Bodies should not only benefit one another, but secure the whole, is interrupted, and Men live not as Neighbours, but Spies, always upon Designs of en-

2. *They disturb  
 the Peace of  
 Cities and Cor-  
 porations :*



trapping and ensnaring ; for while they look on one another as Enemies to God, they think that rescinds all Obligations of Friendship among themselves, and when Religion bears the Standard, the War will be concluded necessary and honourable. But though it be so in Imagination only, it is sure there are some who make it really profitable ; for as in most Camps, the greater Number are attracted rather by Hope of Booty than Concern for the Cause ; so here, many Men list themselves under one Party, that they may have Pretence to prey upon the rest. And to that End several very commodious Axioms have been taken up ; as, that *no Faith is to be kept with Hereticks* ; that *Dominion is founded in Grace*, &c. By such Measures as these, the Goods of the *Egyptians* become lawful Prizes to any, that please to call themselves *Israelites* ; and indeed *Jews* they may be called, in that Notion we vulgarly use it, of *unjust and cruel Extortioner* ; but sure not such *Israelites* as Christ defines *Nathanael*, *John* i. 47. *without guile* : For having thus consecrated their Frauds, and found an Expedient of serving God and *Mammon* together, there is no Piece of Deceit either too big or too little for them ; no Transaction is so important, which can oblige their Fidelity ; none so trivial as to discourage their Rapin ; Opportunity is the only Measure and Rule of their Attempts ; by this Means, no Obligation of Contract, no Laws of Commerce can escape unviolated ; every thing is lawful that may weaken the Wicked, and that Zeal which makes Men Saints in the Church or Conventicle, can make them Thieves in the Shop or Market. Thus is Piety made an Engine of Rapine, and by these religious Riots, all Boundaries wherewith Laws or Equity have fenced Mens distinct Properties, are thrown down : And sure this is a most carnal Consequent of our spiritual Debates, and bids fair

fair towards the reducing us to that State of common Hostility, which some have fancied to be the original Condition of Mankind : For it renders Commerce so dangerous, that Men may, within a while, think it safer to trust their own Strengths, than to the Shelter of those Laws and civil Compacts, which they see so avowedly evacuated. And upon this Account, though the Injury be immediately done to private Persons, it becomes a public Mischief. Yet alas, these are but the more moderate Effects of our Dissensions ; they afford more expedite and compendious Ways of publick Ruin ; the defrauding or undermining of a few Neighbours, are petty Prizes for those that think they have the sole Right to the Creature, and are those Meek who are to *inherit the earth*, and every such Acquist only serves to flesh them for a farther Chace.

The Spoils of a broken Kingdom will afford something worth the scrambling for ; and nothing more fit to break it than a Pretence of Religion, which, like the Stone that smote *Nebuchadnezzar's* Image, has shivered the most goodly Monarchies.

3. *They disturb the Peace of whole Kingdoms and Provinces.*

And, accordingly, we see no Engine is more constantly used by Men of seditious Spirits, to disturb and subvert Governments ; indeed there can be nothing so advantageously fitted for the Purpose. For should such Persons unmask their Design, and shew it in its native Ugliness, should they avow the shaking of a Kingdom merely to establish themselves in a Condition of Wealth and Grandeur, the new-moulding of a Government, only that they might shape their own Shares in it, it were impossible they should find any Abettors ; for though the Multitude are always in Preparation for Change, yet it is not on Intuition of Benefit to some private Persons, but

of somewhat wherein themselves may partake : Nor is even the Madness of the People mad enough to expose all their own Interest, and most important Concerns only to promote those of others. It has, therefore, always been both the Rule and Practice for such Designers to suborn the publick Interest to countenance and cover their private ; to cry up *Diana* to secure their own Gain, and to make the seduced Populace, like the Jackall to the Lion, hunt that Prey which themselves mean to devour. And of all those Artifices by which such Incendiaries have set Kingdoms in a Flame, none has been more universally successful than the Pretext of Religion, which is thought so creditable a Cause to engage in, as can convert the infamous Titles of Rebel and Traitor into those of Patriot and Saint, and, consequently, take off all Discouragement arising from the Disreputation of such an Enterprize ; and no less potent is it in solving the Scruples of its Unlawfulness ; for, by a dextrous Anticipation, it makes Conscience a Party, that it may exclude it from being Judge, and by that only Fallacy of supposing Religion to be a just Ground of Quarrel, makes Way for all the wild Consequences deducible from that false Principle ; and, indeed, where that is thoroughly fastened, the Mischiefs are not only great but incurable, and yet the more so, by how much the Person is more zealous. For, alas, what will it avail to tell such a Man, it is a Sin to *fight against his King*, when he will tell you it is a greater not to *fight for his God* ; that he contracts a heinous Guilt in violating the Peace of the Church, when he, with as great Confidence, believes he merits in propagating its Truth ; that he is accountable for the Blood of his Brethren, when he thinks he has, like the Levitès, *Exod. xxxii.* consecrated himself in it, and offered it an acceptable Sacrifice to God.

Thus

Thus unhappily are these Men fortified in their Sin, by presuming it their Virtue, and while the furious Zeal of such is made subservient to the wicked Craft of others, it is a most apt Instrument of publick Mischief, there being no Attempt so desperate, which such may not be put upon, who are, methinks, used, as *Hannibal* is said to have done those Oxen, whose Horns he first fired, and then sent them to disturb the *Roman Camp*: These Men, as those Beasts, are found very useful for the molesting of others; but commonly all they acquire to themselves, is the Smart of their own Flames. Few of those who thus, in the Simplicity of their Heart, follow an *Abshalom* or a *Sheba*, that do not either miscarry together with the Design, or else live to discern how much their Credulity was abused; and that both Religion (however pretended) and those that fought for it, were only made Properties to promote the Lusts of those who despised both. But it is unnecessary to insist farther on the Effects of such religious Fury, of which we, of this Nation, have had so many and so costly Evidences, as far transcend the most tragical Descriptions. God grant we may never have other than our past Experiences to measure them by: But certainly there is little Reason to be secure, so long as the Root of them, our speculative Differences, daily increase; for unless we could suppose an Age of such Innocence, that there should be none who would take any undue Advantages, it is sure there will be enough given: And, indeed, when we reflect upon our past Distractions, and consider how trivial the Matter of most of those Debates was, whose Manner has been so cruelly solemn; how our slightest Problems have been writ in Blood, that many Thousands have been made naked to keep the Surplice off a few Mens Backs, and we have pulled down our Churches in



Displeasure at the Windows ; when, I say, these, and a thousand the like are considered, we must conclude, that there can never want Occasion to them that (in the Apostle's Phrase) desire Occasion ; the lightest Distempers in the Church being contagious, and most apt (when fomented by ambitious Designers) to beget an universal Plague in the Commonwealth. And now who can, without Horror, consider these miserably perverted Effects of Christian Religion, that that which was designed the most inviolable Bond of Unity, should, like those Curls of entangled Snakes with which *Erinnys* is said to have infuriated *Athamas* and *Ino*, become the fatal Incendiary of the mortallest Hatred ; that that Oeconomy which was meant to regulate, should be the Instrument of confounding and embroiling the World ; and a Gospel of Peace should thus be made the Incentive to War, and create fiercer Quarrels than those it was to have composed. To turn the grace of God into wantonness, is justly branded as a great Crime, but sure to turn it into Malice is yet a greater. And though every Sin offers Violence to our Religion, yet this is, of all others, the most barbarous, thus to make it assassinate itself, become a kind of *felo de se*, and contribute to its own Ruin. And that this is the Case, is, I presume, sufficiently evident in all the foregoing Instances, which, as they are most obviously the Effect of our eager Disputes, so are they no less visibly destructive to Christianity in all its Interests, leave it neither Root nor Branch, neither inward Vigour, nor outward Lustre, so at once rendering it both infertile and unamiable. It was a Piece of hostile Severity against *Moab*, to fill the land with stones, thereby to render it barren, 2. Kings. iii. 25. The Slingers went about and smote it : But what that suffered from professed Enemies, the Church daily sustains from those that

Chap. XII. *in reference to civil Peace.* 283

call themselves her best Friends. Our *Benjamites* are so in love with their Skill of slinging to a Hair's Breadth, their nice Criticisms, Distinctions and Subtilities, have cast abroad so many Stones of Contention, that the Church is become perfect Quarry, utterly sterile and unfruitful; as to all those good Works for the Production whereof she was so peculiarly fenced and cultivated by God; nay, it were well if Barrenness were the worst, and that she had not, on the other side, acquired an unhappy degenerate Fertility: But what a numerous and accursed Issue spring from this unpeaceable Temper, the foregoing Considerations do too sadly demonstrate; and I doubt not every attentive Observer will be able to add more (though not truer) Instances; and besides, to discern that this spurious Brood, like that of *Hagar*, is grown so wantonly insolent, as to despise the right Heir of the Promise. The true Gospel-graces of Meekness, Peaceableness, and universal Charity, are accounted earthly phlegmatick Qualities, we disclaim that Holy Ghost which descends in the Appearance of the Dove, nay, or in Fire either, unless it be like that of *Elijah*, to consume all that disgust us; nor do we measure our Religion so much, by the Opposition it makes to our Lusts, as to those whom we first make, and then call our Enemies. Thus miserably have we changed the Scene, and by *calling evil good, and good evil*, have accumulated Injuries upon our oppressed Christianity, not only robbed it of its Rule, but of its Reputation also. And do we daily thus see *Ishmael* mocking *Isaac*, and shall we not think it Time to cast out the Bondwoman and her Son? Shall we, for ever, cherish this Generation of Vipers to tear out the Bowels of our common Mother? I pray God the Question have not as much of Preface as Expostulation. For if we consider the present State of Things, how our  
Contentions.

Contentions plead not only Right, but Prescription, there seems not much Hope of dispossessing them, and yet less, when it is remembered how they have entwisted themselves, not only with the Passions, but Interests of Men, two such potent Abettors as well buoy up the most forlorn Cause. The Truth is, there are many subterraneous Springs which feed this Ocean, and though Religion and Piety be, on all hands, demurely pretended, yet as we have seen the Effects of our Debates very disconsonant to such a Profession ; so, if we examine the Originals and Causes, we shall find them for the most Part as widely distant. It may not be amiss to take a short View of some of them ; for though I cannot hope the Discovery of the Causes will contribute to the general Cure, yet perhaps it may prove an Antidote to some particular Persons, who will be the less apt to admire the Verdure of the Leaves (the flourishing Appearances of Zeal and Piety) when they find both Fruit and Root of so poisonous a Quality.

---

C H A P. XIII.

*A Survey of the Causes of Disputes ; and first, Pride.*

*One great Cause of our Contentions and Disputes is Pride.*

- I. **A**ND in this Inquest we find Pride already arraigned to our Hands, by the wisest of Men, *Prov. xii. 10. Only by pride cometh contention.* It is indeed a most prolifick Vice, and there are few Sins to which it is not either a Parent or Nurse : But there is scarce any that does more betray its immediate Descent from it than this of Strife and Debate, which has so many of the Lineaments and Features of the deformed Mother, as sufficiently

sufficiently attests its Extraction. And as this is true of all Strifes in general, so particularly of those whereof we now treat : For Pride being itself an internal Sin, it has such a Neighbourhood with all the Notions and Speculations of the Mind, that it easily makes Impressions on them : Nor are we to wonder that the Sacredness of divine Things is not Amulet enough against its Charms, when we remember that the first Act of Pride that ever was committed, was levelled even at God himself ; and as it took up its first Seat in a spiritual Substance, so has it ever since, never acted more naturally, and therefore more vigorously, than about spiritual Matters. Of this the Church, in all Ages, has had many costly Experiments ; for if we trace the Catalogues of Heresies from *Simon Magus* his Days down to our own, we shall find Pride a principal Actor in every Scene, though perhaps in various Dresses. For though Pride be always, in the general, an Affectation of some Transcendency, yet it differs as to the particular Object, according to the several Estimates Men make of Excellencies. So that the Propugners of new Opinions, though they have this common Aim, that they seek their own Exaltation, yet do not always do it in the same Instances. For Example, some have coveted the Repute of profound Inquisitors, and this Vanity has prompted them to dive so deep into the Bowels of every the plainest Doctrine, till, at last, they have twisted and entangled them into the most perplexing Difficulties. These Navigators think they have never sailed successfully, till they have found out a *Terra incognita*, though God knows they bring nothing from thence for the Benefit of the habitable World, nor make it their Business to resolve Doubts, but start them. Another sort of Men there are, of so fastidious and petulant Wits, that



that they disdain an Opinion of which themselves are not the Authors ; they love not to have their Understandings prescribed to, by the Preconceptions of others, how divinely soever inspired, and will rather have a Religion of their own making than of his whom they pretend to worship. And this, it is to be doubted, is the Bottom of the great Veneration some have paid to Reason, which they have set up in the Throne, not only in defiance of blind implicate Assent, but even of divine Revelation. But, in the mean time, it is to be observed, that it is not Reason in general, the common Excellency of our Nature, that is thus advanced, but every Man's own private and individual ; which, upon a just Scanning, will often be found the most distant thing from what it is called ; Passion and Fancy, by that omnipotent Advantage of being a Man's own, often passing for deep Discourse and Ratiocination ; and what a fruitful Harvest of Tares such Seed is apt to produce, our Reason would inform us, if our Experience did not. To these we may add another Rank of Men, who vehemently thirsting after a Name in the World, hope to acquire that, by being the Disseminators of novel Doctrines ; they think, while they go on in the beaten Track, they shall be obscured in the Throng ; the only Way to make themselves conspicuous is to be singular : Thus fondly choosing to be eminent, though, by the infamous Characters of Heretick or Schismatick, and (like him that fired *Diana's* Temple to secure himself from Oblivion) build themselves Monuments of the Church's Ruin : And sure this *Thendas* his Ambition of being somebody, has helped to raise more Opinions than he did Men. Yet commonly it answers it even in that Circumstance also ; for when, by separating themselves from the Unity of the Faith, they have rendered themselves remarkable, their next Aim is to have

have others to join them ; and so they may have the Honour of being Leaders, care not though it be into the Ditch. To be called of Men *Rabbi, Rabbi*, is enchanting Mulick to any Pharisee, and serves like the Timbrels in Tophet, to drown the Cries not of their Children, but Mothers scorching in the Flames of their Contention. Indeed so impetuous and uncontrollable is this kind of Vanity, that, like a mighty Torrent, it bears down all before it, overwhelms not only the opposite Virtues, but even all Vices that are not of its own Confederacy. Men can, in this Case, lay severe Restraints upon their most intimate Sensualities, when they suspect them treacherous to this grand Design. The Wolf shall be muzzled, and made to behave himself with the Meekness befitting the Sheeps Cloathing. The Swine shall be washed, and, by an unnatural Violence, withheld from the Mire : All their rapacious and bestial Appetites controuled and made tame, that they worry not their Reputation ; and all this for a little naked Popularity, for whose dear Purchase very many have thought fit to divest themselves, both of lawful and unlawful Enjoyments ; and have thought the tumultuous Applause of a few factious Spirits worth all that Self-denial. But all Pride is not so perfectly Chamæleon as to subsist upon this mere Air, there is another kind of it that proposes to itself something beyond this : Such is the Affectation of Rule and Dominion, which, tho' in respect of any real Good to the Ruler, is as very a Chimera as the former ; yet, commonly, they that are under such a Jurisdiction, find, to their Cost, it is more than imaginative. And God knows this aspiring Humour has been no less fatally active in Ecclesiastick than in Civil Affairs ; nor has the Church ever been in more Danger of Anarchy than by those who most impatiently coveted a Share in  
its

its Government ; for where this Spirit of Ambition is the Impellent, it does, like the Demoniack in the Gospel, burst asunder all Fetters and Chains, violates the Unity both of Doctrine and Discipline, nor is any Attempt too bold for Men thus animated : They who long to be in Authority, think the Door opens not quick enough for their Entry, and impatient of so tedious an Expectation, choose rather to make Breaches in the Walls (nay sometimes to undermine the Foundation) than to wait an Access to their Desires. Neither is there any thing so sacred, which, upon this Occasion, they cannot prostitute ; when *Diotrephes*, 3 *John* 9. seeks Pre-eminence, the Dictates even of an Apostle shall be rejected ; and even the Divinity of Christ, *God blessed for ever*, be trampled on, when *Arius* wants a Footstool to climb up to his affected Greatness. In a word, if we examine the Occurrences of all Ages, we shall find, that either the Eagerness of acquiring, or the Revenge of missing Dignities, have been the great Instigators of Ecclesiastical Feuds ; and sure our modern Stories are not likely to fall short of the ancient, in Examples of this Kind. And as Pride makes some thus passionately desirous of Rule, so it makes others as impatient of being ruled, and even those who cannot hope to arrive to give Laws, will not endure to be under those already established. That this is indeed the Christian Liberty for which many in our Days have so unchristianly contended, is too apparent, the fundamental Quarrel has been against Subjection : Yet to countenance and abet that, whole Armies of frivolous Cavils have been raised, and the Church attacked in every its remotest Concern ; and though there be nothing farther from that Unity of Mind, to which the Simile was first affixed, yet in a perverse Sense it imitates the Ointment of *Aaron* in descending from the head to the skirts.

*skirts of the cloathing* : Not only the supreme and more eminent Parts, but the most slight extrinſick and inferior Relatives to Religion being aſperſed and depraved ; and the moſt innocent Circumſtances of civil or natural Actions made criminal, when applied to divine Things. A ſtrange infective Power, which theſe Men have conveyed into God's Service, that it muſt thus pollute every thing that approaches it. That the Place where his Honour dwells muſt become a Peſt-houſe, and diſſuſe Contagion to all in it : (I wiſh, by the way, their Sacrilege had not been too valiant in deſpiſing the Danger of thoſe infected Utenſils, which may, perhaps, ſadly verify the Reproach, and prove treacherous Prizes.) And when Mens Zeal operates thus unkindly, when the Pretence of internal Sanctity devours all outward Decency, and God is to be honoured and exalted by thoſe Ways, whereby Men would think themſelves affronted and vilified ; we have too great Reason to think ſuch a Zeal as little according to Godlineſs as Knowledge, and that it is not ſo much the Tenderneſs of their Conſciences, no nor generally the Weakneſs of their Brains, but the Iron Sinew in their Necks, which makes them at once ſo ſcrupulous, and ſo clamorous ; for though the former might be ſuppoſed owing to Error, the latter can ſurely proceed from nothing but Pride. Several other Inſtances might be given to ſhew how that pernicious Temper has contributed to the Riſe and firſt Being of our Diviſions ; and having thus given them Birth, it does not, like the Oſtrich, abandon its Brood, but has as great an Influence in the cheriſhing and maintaining, as it had in creating them. Of this there need no other Proof than the mere Nature of Pride, which, as it averts nothing more than Self-condemnation ; ſo, upon Pain of that Appearance, it is irreverſibly engaged in the



Pursuit of its first Undertakings, any desisting being interpretatively a Confession either of an Error or a Defeat, both which are insupportable to an assuming Temper: So that, besides the original Incentives forementioned, it has this of Disdain superadded to actuate its Motions. And accordingly we find they are at this Rebound the more violent, not only the Success, but the Credit of the first Enterprize depending upon a vigorous Prosecution: So that *Catiline's* Maxim of Villainy seems to have been adopted into some Mens Divinity, and they think past Crimes are only to be secured by more and greater. Nor is it only Hope to atchieve their Design, or hide their Shame, which thus animates them, Despair will do it to a yet higher Degree. Our concupiscible and irascible Appetites dwell not so remote, but they are ready Reserves to one another, and what was Desire in the Pursuit, becomes Anger and Revenge in the Disappointment; and sure we need not be told the wild Effects of those Passions. How many Men have, in a furious Despair over-acted even their own Projects, and have made it a malicious Consolation in their Ruin, to get it attended with that of the Publick? As *Herod*, who, to secure a Lamentation at his Death, commanded a Massacre should accompany it, or (to give a more ecclesiastical Instance) like *Aerius*, who sought the abolishing of that Order in the Church, whereof himself could not partake. I wish no Man's Conscience, in our Days, were qualified to suggest a fresher Example. But whilst it is so many Ways the Interest of Pride to abet our Contentions, we cannot think it so sluggish or unindustrious an Agent, as not to find out Expedients for its Purpose. I shall not attempt to give a Particular of its Instruments; when I have said that Schism is one of them, I need not add more, since that alone serves both

both to complete and perpetuate the Mischief of all our speculative Dissensions. How close a Band of Concord the communicating in holy Duties is, we may learn by *Jeroboam*, who seems so well to have understood its unitive Efficacy, that he durst not trust the newly divided Tribes in a joint Resort to the Temple; and therefore, lest the Rupture he had made in the State should close again, he thinks it necessary to make another in the Church, and secure his Defection from his Prince by that from his God. But we need not borrow a Testimony from that his impious Policy, we have a more authentick Attestation from the holy Psalmist, who, when he would describe the greatest Entireness, exemplifies it by the *walking to the house of God as friends*, *Psalms* lv. 14. And the Apostle goes yet higher, and from our common Participation of the Eucharist, infers not only our Union, but our Incorporation; *we being many, are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread*, *1 Cor. x. 17.* And then sure, we may, on the contrary, conclude, that our Separation must have the quite distant Effects, alienate our Affections, and by that means still more estrange our Judgments. For, besides that it is natural to Men to think they can never run far enough from that they begin to loath, they are, in their own Defence, to amplify the Differences, that they may acquit themselves from the Scandal of a causeless Separation; and this, God knows, is the usual Method among us; when we have broken Communion, our only Study is not how to repair, but justify it. The Adversaries Tenets are rigorously scanned, new Charges exhibited, and the Schism defended upon those later Discoveries, which were no Motives to the making it. And then sure no Man can doubt but this is a proper

Way both to multiply and eternize Disputes ; and it is abundantly manifest, that Vanity and Elation of Mind is the Cause that Men thus prefer a mistaken Reputation before their own Innocence, or the Church's Peace. Indeed, if we thoroughly consider it, we shall find Pride is one of the fatallest Instruments of Excision, the two-edged Sword by which adverse Parties do mutually cut themselves from one another. The very Elements and constitutive Parts of a Schismatick, being the Esteem of himself, and the Contempt of others. *I am not as this publican*, was, we know, the Voice of the proud Pharisee, whose very Name signifies *Separation*, and our modern Separatists do but echo the same Note, when they pronounce all those heretical or carnal, from whom they have withdrawn : Or, perhaps, they derive from a yet more ancient Precedent, those of whom the Prophet *Isaiah* speaks, *Isaiah lxxv. 5.* which say, *Stand by thyself, come not near me, for I am holier than thou* ; an insolent kind of Language, which the *Cathari*, in the primitive Times, did not more exactly transcribe, than many Sects of differing Denominations have done in ours. But it is to be remembered, that while the Pharisee looked so fastidiously on the poor Publican, he renounced Communion in Prayers much more acceptable than his own ; and those refined Zealots, who feared Contagion from the Approach of their more innocent Brethren, could boldly venture on the Pollutions of the most detestable Idolatries : And God knows the Note has too ready an Application in both Instances. In the mean time, it is a sad Contemplation that so much of that Zeal which makes such a glistering in the World, shall, when brought to the Touch, be found adulterate ; that the transcendent Purity Men boast of, should prove but a more sublimated Wickedness, and their Pretence to  
Spirituality

Spirituality be verified only in spiritual Pride. Alas, is not the whole Circuit of secular Things wide enough to contain this swelling Humour? Are there not Pumps and Vanities of the World enough to entertain this one Lust, but must this *Moabite* be brought into the Sanctuary? Can we not be elevated enough unless we trample upon all that is holy, and make Religion Factor for our Ambition? We find some very confidently point out Antichrist upon the Strength of this one predicted Circumstance, that he was to *sit in the temple of God*. But what need we travel beyond the *Alps* to find out that, which every where presents itself? Our Pride does too unhappily answer the Description; and though there is no Instance wherein it can cease to be Antichristian, yet sure it is more eminently so, when it thus usurps God's Seat, and rules in sacred Things. Would God the Pains and Animosity which has been spent in discovering and reviling other Antichrists, had been diverted to the pulling down of this, the Labour would have been more effectual even to the immediate End of the Designers; for were this Pride eradicated, the Foundation of all spiritual Usurpations were undermined. But, alas, those who exclaim the most loudly against all foreign Tyranny on their Consciences, do obsequiously bow to this intestine Usurper, make an entire Dedition of themselves, and submit to the severest and ignoblest Vassalage. They have invested it with so absolute and sovereign a Power, that (as *Samuel* warns the *Israelites* of their King, 1 *Sam.* viii.) they are not to call any thing their own, when it is useful to its Service: All their Powers, all their Interests are devoted to it, and that not only to adorn its Pomp, but to fight its Battles. Men quarrel and contend till not only themselves, but even Christianity itself expire in the Contest. But



if it be indeed certain that every War is so far unjustifiable, as are the Causes of it; it will surely be a competent Prejudice against our Contentions, that our Pride is so much concerned in them, which is so unchristian a Motive, as all the holy Water wherewith Men have sprinkled it; can never baptize into a Cleanness; all the borrowed Dresses of Zeal and Sanctity, however they may disguise, can never legitimate it. Those Arts of Concealment may, indeed, add a new Guilt, that of Hypocrisy, but can never expiate, no nor extenuate the old: And how Saint-like a Form soever our Vain-glory puts on, it does but the more own its Derivation from him, who can *transform himself into an angel of light*, whose Aspirings have first subverted himself, and now go on to propagate both his Crime and Ruin to us; nor has he ever managed that Design with more Art or Success, than by thus making our Pride a Partition-wall to divide us from one another, and consequently, from God too; who being, as our Church styles him, *the Author of Peace and Lover of Concord*, can never join himself with the Disturbers of both, but must necessarily be disoblged by our Dissensions and Schisms.

## C H A P. XIV.

*A Survey of the Causes of Disputes ; secondly, Curiosity.*

*Another Cause of our Dissensions is unwarrantable Curiosity.*

I: IF now we proceed farther in our Enquiry, we shall find, that another grand Incendiary of our Disputes is Curiosity: A Vice which, though in some Respects it may be reckoned a Species of the former,

former, that of Pride, yet, in others, it admits a distinct Consideration. This is that baneful Weed which the Devil made a shift to steal even into Paradise, and which has ever since affected the richest Soils, the most pregnant and polite Wits; nor did it only eject Man from thence, but it has improved the original Curse, and multiplied those Briars and Thorns among which he was cast, yea transplanted them from the Earth, where they could only raze the Skin, into the Brain, where they pierce and torture the intellectual and immortal Part of Man. Nay, farther, even that *sweat of his brows*, which was to extirpate them from the Ground, serves but to water and cherish them in his Mind; his very Industry being, in this Case, the extremest ill Husbandry, and the more Pains he takes, the farther he removes himself from all real Advantages of his Toil.

2. There are some Parts of Knowledge which God has thought *Curiosity about* fit to seclude from us, to fence *some things is* them not only as he did the inter- *both sinful and* dicted Tree, by Precept and Com- *dangerous;* mination, but with Difficulties and Impossibilities; made it not only our Sin and Danger, but our Folly and Madness to attempt them. Of this kind are the mysterious Parts of our Religion, which he shews us, as it were a-far-off, to exercise our Faith and Reverence, but stoops them not to our Sense and Disquisition. These he has placed like the Sun, where they may influence, not annoy, warm, not scorch us. And would we still permit them to remain at that safe and wholesome Distance, we should find none but benign Effects; but so importunate are the Instigations of Curiosity, that no Bounds will keep us from the Mount: We will needs break through into the thick Darkness, how dreadful soever the Thunders and Lightnings are in  
the

the Way. Like bold *Phaeton* we despise all Benefits wherewith the Father of Light can court us, unless we may guide his Chariot ; and we moralize the Fable as well in the Tragicalness of the Event, as the Insolence of the Undertaking, this unhappy Curiosity having not only ruined many of the Inquisitors, but set the whole World also in a Conflagration. Nor is this Temerity more fatal in its Success, than impious in its Foundation : For besides, that it is a direct Invasion of God's Peculiar, and Violation of his Command, it does evidently imply a Distrust, either of his Wisdom or his Goodness ; supposes him either so ignorant of the Strength of those Faculties himself has made, that he has assigned them unproportionable Objects, and so they must have new Work cut out for them by ourselves, or else presumes his Eye evil towards his own Creatures ; that, as the Devil once suggested to our first Parents, he fears the Rivalry of poor Mortals, and by an envious Detention of some Parts of Felicity, like one that had been bountiful only upon Surprise and Incogitancy, illiberally retracts and contradicts his original Design of making Man completely happy. Nay, indeed, this represents him unkind, not only to us his created Images, but even to that eternal and express Image of his Person, *the Son of his bosom*, who may well be thought to have been as despised in his Eyes as he was once in ours, *Isaiah liii. 3.* if he have so cheaply exposed him for their sakes, to whom he denies any of those intellectual Advantages which difference them from Beasts. Thus wickedly curious are we, that rather than converse with vulgar ordinary Things, we create Prodigies, put new Forms upon him that is unchangeable, rob Divinity of its most inseparable Attributes, and not only disobey God, but reproach him : And then it is no Wonder, if that which affords so little Glory to God,

God, hath no more Good-will for Men, and that which thus wars with Heaven, leave little Peace on Earth. Indeed, if we will be building our Babels, and thus assault Omnipotence, it is but just we should have our Language confounded, and that that Knowledge for which we boldly attempt to rifle God's Cabinet, should, like the Coal from the Altar, serve only to embroil and consume the sacrilegious Invaders. Yet besides what is owing to divine Vengeance in the Case, the Thing has, in itself, a proper natural Efficiency towards it; for when so many Men are engaged in a blind Search, it is not imaginable they should all stumble upon the same Notions, and supposing them to fall upon Variety, it is impossible but Mens fond overweening of their own Conceits and petulant Disdains of others, will improve that Variety into Opposition and that Opposition into set and solemn Feuds. And God knows the Church is too effectually acquainted with this fatal Gradation, and can experimentally attest the unhappy Propriety of this sort of Curiosity towards the engendering of Discord and Confusion.

3. But besides this higher Rank *in other Things* of Things which God hath set so *it is vain, useless, and unprofitable.* much above us, there are others of an inferior sort, as much below us, which are concealed from us, not for their Sublimity, but their Usefulness; for as God on the one hand remembers that we are but Flesh, unable to bear the nearer Approaches of Divinity, and so talks with us, as once with *Moses*, through a Cloud: So, on the other, he forgets not that *he breathed into us the breath of life*, a vital active Spirit, whose Motions he expects should own the Dignity of its Original, and as it was itself an Emanation of the essential Goodness, should aim at  
only



only real and solid Good, and not evaporate and exhaust its Powers in mean and impertinent Pursuits. And upon this Score also, he has found it necessary to hide many things from us, not that they would dazle, but misemploy our Eye ; not swallow up our Understanding, but divert our Attention from what is more important : Of this Sort are those many thin aërial Speculations, the certain Knowledge whereof would bring us no real Advantage, make us at all the wiser to Salvation ; yet such a Value does our inquisitive Nature set upon every thing for its being hid, that, as if our Life were bound up with these Secrets, and all our Felicity dwelt in the Shade of these Recesses, we pursue this Search with indefatigable Industry, ransack all Corners with as great Diligence as the Woman for her lost Piece of Silver, *Luke xv. 8.* And as if this were indeed the Treasure hid in the Field, sell all that we have, lay out our whole selves upon the Purchase. Indeed, he that shall consider what solemn Disquisitions there are upon the slightest and inconsiderablest Subjects, with what Advertence and Concern Questions of this kind are bandied in the World, must wonder how Men can at once be so serious and so trifling ; or that those who can say so much should not once ask themselves to what Purpose they say any thing. Yet what Multitudes of Men are there engaged in such Cases as this ? When alas, the Quarry is not worth half the Toil, could it be gotten : But what *Solomon* says of the Sluggard, *Prov. xii. 27.* that *he roasteth not that which he took in hunting*, is true of the contrary Temper, these over-busy Spirits whose Labour is their only Reward, they hunt a Shadow and chace the Wind ; and when they strain to their utmost Speed, there is still the wonted Distance between them and their Aims ; all their eager Pursuits bring them no Acquitt ; but after they have

have traversed so much Ground, traced all the Mazes that learned Curiosity could contrive to perplex Men, and studied to the Weariness of the Flesh, if not to the Quenching of the Spirit too, they are still in the same Ignorance from whence they set out, and it were well if they were also in the same Doubtfulness: But the Unhappiness of it is, they acquire a Confidence without any true Ground of it, and get such a Knowledge as may puff up, but not edify. This was eminently exemplified in the Gnosticks of old, whose vain Chimæras, and foolish Questions, as the Apostle calls them, *Tit. iii. 9.* passed with them for such a superlative Wisdom, as gave them Insolence to discriminate themselves from others by that swelling Title, and monopolize the Reputation of Science, which yet, if we will believe the great Doctor of the *Gentiles*, and he too brought up at the Feet of *Gamatiel*, the greatest Rabbi of the *Jews*, was Science falsely so called. And, God knows, they want not Successors in this as well as in other Particulars; Men are so possessed with their own Fancies, that they take them for Oracles, and think they see Visions, and are arrived to some extraordinary Revelations of Truth, when indeed they do but dream Dreams, and amuse themselves with the fantastick Ideas of a busy Imagination. Yet would they only please themselves in the Delusion, the Phrensy were more innocent, but, like the prouder sort of Lunatics, they will needs be Kings and Rulers, impose their wild Conjectures for Laws upon others, and denounce War against all that receive them not. And this is that which makes the great Combustion and Confusion among us; for while one Man opines one Way, another another, and each will obtrude his Opinion on every body else, it is impossible but the Contests should be sharp and endless; for each Man

labours

labours under a double Impatience, the one of having his own Notions rejected, the other of having the quite contrary imposed on him ; and tho' it is true the Reciprocalness of the Injury ought to allay the Displeasure at it, yet Men so much more consider what they suffer than what they do, that every one cries out aloud of that hard Measure, which himself offers without Regret. And between Winds so contrary and so fierce, it is no Wonder if Storms arise ; and in such Tempests has Religion so long been tossed, that it now needs the Interposition of a divine miraculous Power to keep it from sinking ; for, alas, these Skirmishes expire not with the first Propugners of the Opinions ; they perhaps began as single Duellers, but then they soon get their Troops about them, have their Partisans and Abettors, who not only enhance, but entail the Feud to Posterity. And indeed this Propagation of Strife, both in these trifling and the former more profound Speculations, is the most fatal Circumstance of the whole Case : Were it not for this, though we might have many Errors, we could have no Sects. And if the Church might be sometimes wounded with the Darts of single Adversaries, yet she could not be surrounded and besieged with Combinations and Confederacies. Some straggling Soldiers might prove Renegadoes, but they would not revolt in Troops and Legions. We should not have such numerous Parties, who with the greatest Violation of Christian Unity, denominate themselves not from the grand *author and finisher of our faith*, but from the first Broacher of their idolized Opinions. In the mean time, it is a sad Contemplation, that a little vain Curiosity should weigh so much, or the Church's Peace so little with us, that we should sacrifice the one to the Satisfaction, shall I say, or rather to the whetting and inflaming of the other.

But

But it is a yet sadder, that this should chiefly be done by those whose Learning enables, and whose Profession should devote to the most noble and most profitable Studies; nay, have the highest Obligations to correct those Exorbitancies in others, which with such Art and Labour they propagate and teach. How wounding a Spectacle is it to see our greatest Heros like *Hercules* at the Distaff, thus degenerously employed, and to find those who were by Christ designed for Fishers of Men, thus entertain themselves like Children, with picking up Shells and Pebbles on the Shore; and, which is yet more unmanly, wrangling about them too. Indeed, at this rate, it is no Wonder if they make the Disciples Complaint, *We have travelled all night, and have taken nothing.* This, sure, is so little the Way to win Souls, that he whose Business it is to destroy them, can very contentedly refer them to this Method, can gladly leave us all our nice and subtle Disquisitions upon the very same Score that one of the *Gothick* Commanders advised the sparing of the *Italian* Schools and Libraries; Let us, says he, leave them their Books, that, whilst they amuse themselves with such Follies, we may subdue them at our pleasure. It is the Saying of the wise Man, *There is a wisdom that multiplieth bitterness;* and sure if there be a Wisdom acquired by these curious Enquiries, it is of this sort, like the Knowledge of Good and Evil, attained by our first Parents, which taught them to know the Good only by its Loss, and the Evil by its Smart. Indeed our too high and transcending Speculations on the one Hand, and our too trivial and unprofitable on the other; are like the torrid and frigid Zones, the one consumes us with its Heat, the other chills and benumbs us with its Cold, that turns us to Cinders, this to Ice. These little trifling Notions being too slight an Ex-

VOL. II. C c exercise



ercise to keep Heat in our Christianity, which not only expresses but maintains its Life by strong and vigorous Motions. And therefore between these two intemperate, God has provided us an habitable Climate, I mean that middle Rank of divine Truths which tend to Practice. Here he would have us dwell and converse, fix our Thoughts and Studies: Nor need we fear that they are too dry a Subject for our Contemplation. We see as deep Speculators as any now assume to be, found it far otherwise. *David* could entertain himself with the meditations of God's law (not his hidden Decrees or Counsels) *all the day*, Psalm cxix. 97. Nay, it seems, the Matter was so copious and redundant, that it could not be confined within that narrow Boundary of Time, but invaded the Night also; forced him to desist from his Rest, to bestow on his Meditations, *I have thought of thy name, O Lord, in the night season, and have kept thy law*, Verse 55. Neither is it a vain Expence of Time, which it thus tempts to, but gives the happiest Improvement, lands at that Harbour to which all rational Studies tend, gives Understanding, Verse 130. *makes wise the simple*, Psalm xix. 7. and this also in an eminent Degree, such as set him above his Teachers, and his Elders also. *Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies. I have more understanding than my teachers, for thy testimonies are my study. I am wiser than the aged, because I keep thy commandments*, Psalm cxix. 98, 99, 100. These are high and liberal Elogies of this divine Study, and if any shall seek to divert an unwelcome Inference, by saying, that *David* spoke them only in pious Raptures, that they were the Transport of his Zeal, rather than the Estimate of his Judgment, we must resolve the Objector far removed from such religious Excesses, and under the contrary Defect;  
yet

yet the Cause will so well bear an Appeal; that he may be trusted to consult farther; let him advise with *Solomon*, whose large Desires and Possessions too of Wisdom, must suppose him no Stranger to its Nature, and he will tell him the very same, and that not in his devouter Extasies, but in his most composed sedate Temper, when he solemnly seats himself in his School, reads Ethicks to his Disciples, and professes his Design of giving Subtily to the Simple, and to the young Man Knowledge and Discretion, *Prov. i. 4.* For, if his whole Book of Proverbs be scanned, the Sum of it will be found to be nothing else but an Exhortation to the Study of this practick Wisdom. Nay, when his own Understanding was improved and advanced by Experience also, when he had not only begged but bought Wisdom, after he had given his Curiosity its full unbounded Range, compassed the whole Universe, and examined not only in Contemplation, but by sensitive Experiment, whatever therein could pretend to be that Good for the Sons of Men, *Ecc. ii. 3.* we find after all this busy Inquest, he gives up his Verdict in this Form, *Ecc. xii. 13.* Let us hear the End of the whole Matter, *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man:* And now, methinks, so solemn a Decision of the wisest of Men, and he too inspired by the omniscient God, may be thought of Weight enough to acquiesce in. Yet since there are some who love not to weigh in the Balance of the Sanctuary, and that had rather receive Responses from *Delphos* than from between the Cherubims: Let such, at least, hear even the Heathen Oracle attesting *Socrates* to be the wisest Man, because he directed his Studies to the moral Part of Learning, which he did to such a Degree, as to disparage all those more airy Speculations, which bettered not Mens Manners, but were

only Noise and Clattering of Words. And *Pythagoras* his School defines Philosophy, *the cleansing and perfecting of human Life*, which two Things are said to be done, first, by Virtue, whose Business it is to remove the Inordination of our Passions: Secondly, by Truth, which restores the Image and Portraiture of God. And since this is the joint Suffrage both of Religion and Reason, why should those that pretend to either defy both, and vainly consume themselves in unprofitable Searches? Why should Men wander to seek Beggary and Emptiness, who may, with far less Labour be rich at home? Alas, it is not bare Knowledge, how great or universal soever, that can possess us of Felicity. Were it possible for us to have a Window into Heaven, to see all the divine Secrets, yet that might be but like the rich Man's Prospect into *Abraham's Bosom*, while himself was in the bottomless Pit. They are not only the gross and illiterate Souls that must feed those Flames, the most aerial and sublimated are rather the more proper Fuel for an immaterial Fire, and the Knowledge we carry thither, renders us the fitter Company for him, who knew every thing but how to keep himself happy. It was once the Observation and Wonder of *Plutarch*, that, whereas God has several incommunicable Properties, as Power and Immortality, &c. these all Men aspired to, in the mean time neglected that of Goodness, wherein he was willing all Men should share. And sure there is now Cause of the same Complaint, we would have Omniscience and all Parts of Divinity besides the Holiness, yet, alas, those without these, would prove but fatal Acquests, and that Approach towards being Gods, would only make us the more Devils. The only advantageous as well as possible Way of Assimilation with God, is by Purity, and the Means of that an attentive Consideration

sideration of those divine Revelations which are to regulate our Practice; these, at once, dispense Light and Warmth, direct and revive the Soul: And if Men would not exhale Vapours to cloud and darken them, eclipse the clearest Truths by Difficulties of their own creating, no Man could miss his Way to Heaven for want of Light, and yet so vain are they as to think they oblige the World by involving it in Darkness, as if their Mists should, like that *which watered the new-formed earth, Gen. ii. 9.* supply the Place of the Dew of Heaven. But certainly, to all such in their profusest Liberalities, we need make no other Request than *Diogenes* did to *Alexander*, desire them only that they will not stand between us and the Sun, intercept its Rays, and rob us of that which is infinitely better than any thing they can give us. Were this but obtained, we should soon discern the Inconsiderableness of those things whose Effects have been so sadly considerable to Christendom, those many Chimæras which we wrangle and fight about, would, in this Sunshine, appear but Motes that dance in the Air, (though God knows, as we manage them, they are the most luxurious Rebels to the Prince that rules there.) Were but *St. Paul's* Doctrine thoroughly imbibed, our curious Arts, superfluous unconcerned Studies, would, as it happened *Acts xix.* be supplanted; and our Devotion, if sufficiently accended, would, as theirs, burn up innumerable Books of this sort. And sure, as this would be the greatest, so it would be the most triumphant Bonfire Christendom ever saw, as being not only an Indication but a Means of the mighty Growth, and Prevailing of the Word of God, which our vain Curiosities serve only to impede and obstruct; while they do as mightily advance Dissensions and Animosities amongst Men.



## C H A P. XV.

*A Survey of the Causes of Disputes ; thirdly, Interest.*

*Self-interest is  
a third Cause of  
our Divisions.*

I. **B**UT besides these two, there is a third Fomenter of Divisions, which, either for its Activity or Success, must not subscribe to either of them, and that is Interest. This is the great Idol to which the World bows : To this we pay our devoutest Homage, give it not only our Knees, but our Hearts ; and as if the making us rich were a second Creation, that could cancel all the Obligations of the first, we sacrilegiously intitle our Profit to all the Prerogatives of a Creator, give it an absolute unlimited Dominion over us, allow it to prescribe us all our Measures of Good and Evil, to rule not only our Reason but our Passions too, (a Sovereignty, alas, we would never yield to our God) and as if the giving us Laws were not Empire enough, we permit it to impose Religions also ; for sure they that observe how great an Influence it has in Church-affairs will conclude it governs more than the secular Part of the World. And, indeed, if we look back, we shall find it is no novel Usurpation, but though void of other Title, has the Prescription of many Ages. Divinity has long since been made the Handmaid of Policy, and Religions modelled by Conveniencies of State. The golden Calves became venerable Deities, when they were found apt to secure *Jeroboam's* Jealousies : And *Machiavel's* Policy, that States should serve themselves of Religion, was a common Practice long before it was his Rule. And this Example of Communities has been transcribed by single Persons. In the Old Testament we find frequent Mention of those mercenary Prophets, that turned the Office

Office into a Trade, divined for Money, nay, sometimes for more contemptible Hire, *handfuls of barley, and pieces of bread*: And in the New, we see the same Motive of secular Advantage had Force enough to turn an Ecclesiastick into a Laick, make *Demas* degrade himself, and desert his Ministry, and as it thus stopt his Mouth from preaching the Truth, so it opened those of others to divulge Errors. Such were those Deceivers of whom St. Paul speaks, *Tit. i. 11. Who spake things they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.* So when the same Apostle declaims the most earnestly against the love of money as the root of all evil, we find he fetches his Proof of that Charge from its having made men err from the faith, *1 Tim. vi. 10.* And it is St. Peter's Prediction, that the most damnable Heresies, even the denying of the Lord that bought them, should be introduced by those, who through Covetousness should make Merchandize of their Profelytes, *2 Pet. ii. 4.* and sure the Event attests the Presagé to have concerned more than the Age immediately succeeding, there being none of the subsequent which hath not, in some Degree, assisted its Completion; nor have we Cause to wonder hereat, since it is obvious to discern the Conjunction and Dependence between Covetousness and Heresy. For the itching Ears the Apostle speaks of, being an epidemick Disease, give fair Opportunity to every Mountebank to try his Experiment. When Men nauseate old Truths, because they are acquainted with them, and embrace Doctrines for the very same Reason, they should reject them, even because they are new: When they love no Teachers, but such as thus entertain them, and are bountiful to none but such as they love; there is little Doubt, but there will be Mints enough set on Work, when the Coiners can thus at once stamp new Opinions for their Disciples, and Money for

for themselves : And God knows they are not a few of our Divisions that have thence taken Birth. It will be needless to revel far into the Records of elder Times, every Man's Memory will be able to suggest to him too many, and too pertinent Instances. Upon which Reflexion it will be too visible, that much of some Mens late Pretence to Godliness was but a real Pursuit of Gain, and the new Light served to guide them to their Neighbour's Coffers : And probably many of our Disputes had been superseded, had not the Authors foreseen, that though they lost the Question, they should gain what they more sought. A few Essays had discovered how much the Populacy were pleased with Novelties, especially such as at once gratified their Levity and their Pride, by casting ill Reflexions on the Things or Persons to whom they owned a Reverence ; and the liberal Contributions such Teachers met with, served still to invite more Labourers into that Work, where, without the Uneasiness of a long Expectation, their very Seed-time was their Harvest, and by sowing Tares, they immediately reaped Gold ; and it is no Wonder if such quick Returns made them diligent at the Trade, industrious to provide those Wares they saw they could put off so well. And would to God we were secure that this Way of Traffick were yet at an End, for so long as these spiritual Merchants can thus impose on their credulous Chapmen, make them buy one Mischief with another, and exhaust their Estates to endanger their Souls, we must not hope our Dissensions will ever cease, our Flames ever be extinct, that have so much Matter to feed them, and such importunate Blasts to blow them up.

*The Contentions  
about Religion*

2. But Covetousness is of too unsatiab'e a Nature to be content-  
ed with one Way of Supply, it is  
like

like the Sea that receives the Tribute of all Rivers (though far unlike it in lending any back again) and therefore those who have resolved upon the thriving sort of Piety, have seldom embarked all their Hopes in one Bottom, nor so depended on the Bounty of their Profelytes, as to neglect other Ways of preying for themselves. They wanted not Providence to foresee, how uncertain a Revenue popular Benevolence is: That the same giddy and violent Humour, which had opened their Hands so wide, might, by working another Way, close them as fast; or if their Inclinations continued, their Abilities might fail, (a thing very possible to those who have such Suckers) or if both these remained, yet that they were unlikely to grow in Proportion to their own Appetites, and therefore found it necessary to have some other Reserve; and besides, this Way of flattering their willing Benefactors one of Part, contrived another of forcing their unwilling Neighbours out of all their Possessions; so making the Spoils of some Mens Honesty a richer Booty than that of others Folly. Hence Shiboleths found out of Covenants and Engagements, to give Opportunity of destroying a dissenting Brother; by this Art a fat Benefice became Crime and Witness too against its Incumbent, and he was sure to be unorthodox, that was worth the plundering. Thus, alas, has the Altar of God been attended, or rather invaded by those whose very Approach was a Guilt, that qualified them rather to lay hold on its Horns, than pretend to its Service; for sure that God, who has declared he hates Robbery for Burnt-offering, cannot much affect Robbers for Priests. But this is a Theme so unpleasant, I delight not to enlarge on it, and rather wish that the Memory of it



it were so extinct, that it might remain no where but in the penitential Litanies of the Offenders ; my Design, in the present Reflexion, is only to make it an Evidence how much Covetousness promotes our Contentions, which sure is not more visible any where than in this Instance : For where there is any Design of supplanting that necessarily requires another of accusing ; (even *Jezabel* herself projects not to seize on *Naboth's* Vineyard without a precedent Charge) to comply with which Necessity, not only the Lives and Conversations, but the Doctrines and Opinions of our most eminent Divines have been strangely misrepresented, and when that proved not Fence enough to the Reputation of their Oppressors, they have thought fit to change the Scene, and to combat those Opinions in their true Shape, upon which they could not so well fasten their Disguise. I shall not here need to say with how much, or how little Pretext of Reason they managed those Disputes ; it is enough to my Purpose that such Disputes there were, and those founded in the Desire of acquiring secular Advantages, which sufficiently attests Interest to be a potent Abettor of our Quarrels.

*which appears  
in the Distur-  
bances given  
the Church (by  
Anabaptists)  
abroad.*

3. But God knows that is a Truth of which the World affords so many Proofs, that we need not confine ourselves to this little Angle of it, or owe our Convictions only to our domestick Transactions ; if we look abroad we shall find it too often exemplified. The

memorable Disturbance given to the Church, as well as State of *Germany*, by the Anabaptists, is a pregnant Instance ; whose new Opinion was but an Expedient of investing themselves in new Possessions, and their second Baptism but the Solemnity of espousing,

espousing, not only the Flesh, but the World also, which they had renounced in the first.

4. And would God, they had been the only Sect of Men, whose Doctrines were subservient to their Interests; for such tumultuous and plebeian Projects, though, like a Land-flood, they make great Spoil at the present, yet soon sink again. Such avowed and excessive Greediness devours itself, and the Instruments by which it wrought: So that the Defeat of the secular Design, is commonly the rooting those Opinions which were formed for the promoting it. But when the same Desire has the Advantage of a sober Guidance, when Avarice puts on the Canonical Habit, and twists itself not only with the Practice of Men, but the Doctrines of the Church, when Articles of Religion shall be estimated by their Profitableness, and Ecclesiasticks dispute, as Lay-men fight, for Money, then, alas, the Mischief seems fatal, the Disease so fixed and radicated, as at once discourages and mocks the Attempts of Cure.

*The Opinions of many of our Sects are wholly subservient to their worldly Interest.*

5. That this is the Case, not only in a particular and private Church, but that which assumes to be the Universal and Catholick, is too apparent. The one Position of the Pope's Right to dispose of Kingdoms, outstrips all other Principles of Rapine: This is to drive a Wholesale Trade, when all other petty Merchants deal but for Parcels; which, as it is a much bolder, so is it a more prejudicial Attempt than the invading of private Possessions, and these *duo gladii*, the double Armature of St. Peter, a more destructive Engine than the tumultuary Weapon snatched

*The Religion of the Romish Church is chiefly calculated for the Ends of Covetousness and Ambition,*

snatched up by a Fanatick : But sure *St. Peter's* Sword, though once rashly managed by himself, was never designed to arm his Successors to invade Kingdoms : This Property of it seems rather to have been derived from the *Prætorian* Soldiers, who insolently assumed the disposing of the Empire, wherein they, at the last, arrived to that Impudence, that, after the Death of *Pertinax*, they made open Portsale of it, in a base and sordid Manner, as if it had been of common marketable Wares : I cannot say the Court of *Rome* transcribes that indecent owning of the Traffick ; but it has, in other Instances, so well attested its good Managery, that it is not very credible, that Crowns and Sceptres are conferred *gratis*. And to this so advantageous a Doctrine others bear a Proportion : Those of Purgatory, Indulgences, and Supererogation, are ready Instances, wherein the Assertors themselves seem to be unanimous in nothing but in a joint Reference to Profit ; for when they come to minute Definitions, they vary and disagree ; satisfy one another as little as their common Antagonists : And therefore, in the Council of *Trent*, they prudently chose, in their Decrees, to propose the bare Articles, backed by the Authority of the Church, and Anathemas of the Council, as having, by precedent Discussions of the Points in their Congregations, discerned the small Accord that was among themselves, when they descended to Particulars. And indeed the Opinions were so various as to the Grounds of the Doctrines, that one would wonder how from so differing Premisses, they should all infer the same Conclusion, were it not that the Conspiracy of Interest was too potent for the Diversity of Judgment. And sure it was a strange Deference was given to it, when, in the Matter of Indulgences, there was (by the Testimony of their own Writers)

four different Opinions, and yet all Catholick : Which Moderation towards speculative Dissenters, compared with the great Severity against those that opposed its Practice, speaks loud enough that the Orthodoxy of the Point lay wholly in the Profitableness ; and that *Luther* himself had been no Heretick, had he busied himself only in such Disquisitions, as impeded not the Gain of that Doctrine. Nor is this merely Surmise and Conjecture ; for if we consult the Memorials of those Transactions, we shall find this was the thing that most alarmed *Rome*, put that Court in almost as great a Commotion as the Birth of Christ did *Herod's* : And accordingly in their private Consults, the closer Cabals of the College, the securing this Part of their invaded Treasure was the grand Deliberation ; upon which Account it was, that when *Adrian* shewed some Inclination to the reforming Abuses both in this and other Instances, one of his Cardinals, who better knew the Intrigues of Affairs, admonished him against that unskilful Piece of Ingenuity, not only from the Example of his Predecessors, who were resolute never to confess Faults by mending them, but by representing to him, “ That no Re-  
“ formation could be made, which would not no-  
“ tably diminish the Rents of the Church, which  
“ having four Foundations, the one Temporal, the  
“ other three Spiritual, Indulgences, Dispensations,  
“ and Collations of Benefices ; no one of them  
“ could be stopped, but that one Quarter of the  
“ Revenues would be cut off.” What a Resemblance this Advice carries to the Oration of *Demetrius* to his Fellow-craftsmen, *Acts* xix. 25. I need not stand to demonstrate ; but while such Considerations as this bear Sway in Church-matters, where Profit shall be the Touch-stone both for Faith and Manners, we are not to wonder if no gainful Tenet be



deposited, or Peace bought with that which in most Mens Esteem is of far more Value.

*which renders  
the Differences  
between her  
and us irrecon-  
cilable.*

6. And this is it which ominates sadly as to our Divisions: with the *Romanists*; were our Differences merely the Product of Heat and Passion, they would, like the smaller Clefts in the Ground, want nothing but a cooler Season to cement and close them: But when they are thus formed into an Interest, become the Design not of single Persons or Ages, but of Corporations and Successions; the Breach seems like the Scissures and Ruptures of an Earthquake, and threatens to swallow all that attempt to close it, and reserves its Cure only for Omnipotence. Indeed till spiritual and secular Concerns be reduced into their proper Ranks, which are now mixed and confounded, the better to disguise the preposterous Subordination of the nobler to the inferior, till we have forgotten the unhappy Chymistry of turning all, even Religion itself, into Gold, we must never hope to get out of the Furnace; our Flames will still grow fiercer, and with this unnatural Effect, to consume not the Dross, but the purer Metal. In a word, till Men can sever themselves from their Avarice and mean Pursuits of Gain, they will never cease to separate from their Brethren. For as the most sovereign Balsams cannot cure a Hurt while the Arrow remains in the Flesh, so neither can the most pacifick Remedies at all avail, so long as the same worldly Aims, which made the Wound, still stick in it.

*The sacrilegious  
Spoils of our  
Church is owing  
to the Covetous-*

7. But, in the mean time, it is a melancholick Consideration, that Christianity should be by its Professors thus unworthily prostituted; that the many various and  
opposite

opposite Religions, for which we *ness of our late*  
severally pretend so much Zeal, *Reformers.*  
should be but divers Ways to the  
same irreligious End; wherein our Elders seem to  
resemble those in the Story of *Susanna*, who, when  
they meant to part with each other, yet did una-  
wares meet by the Impulse of the same Lust. We  
find it moved the Patience even of the Lamb of  
God, to see his Father's House made a House of  
Merchandise, though the Traffick was for the fur-  
nishing of Sacrifices: With what Abhorrence must  
we think does he now behold those, who drive so  
much a worse Trade in it; who sell not Accommo-  
dations for Worship, but the Worship itself to ac-  
commodate their Interests, and do not only make  
Gain in the Temple, but of it? a thing the sacrile-  
gious Rapine of our Days has made literally true,  
where, besides the Revenues, the very Fabrick and  
Materials of Churches, have been marketable Ware;  
*Judas's* good Husbandry has been taken up, and *ad*  
*quid perditio hæc*, put as the common Motto upon  
every thing that could be sold for more, nay some-  
times for less than *three hundred pence*. And as *Di-*  
*onysius* took away the golden Beard from *Æsculapi-*  
*us*, to rectify the Indecency of the Son's having a  
Beard when the Father had none; and *Julian* rob-  
bed the Christian Altars with this impious Sarcasm,  
*av τῶν ἁγίων οὐκ ἐστὶν ὑπομίλησις οὐ Μναεὶς υἱος*; that it  
was unfit the Son of Mary should be served in Plate;  
so do Men now-a-days make themselves Regulators  
of holy things, correct the Indecorums of the Sanctu-  
ary, that they may rifle its Treasures. Thus do  
we see the Apostle's Affirmation sadly verified, that  
those who will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare,  
1 *Tim.* vi. 9. Such is the Greediness of a covetous  
Appetite, that it swallows, indiscriminately, what-  
ever looks like Prize, and rather than it want its

Prey, God himself shall be robbed. Nay, it were to be wished, in this Instance, that that were all ; but, alas, he is mocked too, used not only unjustly, but contumeliously ; we thus make him a Property to our sordid Designs, and when he has professed that he will not be served together with *Mammon*, we attempt that which is yet far more blasphemous, and make him pay Service to him with whom he disdains to share it when paid by others.

*Religion is too commonly made use of to serve a base Lust and vile End ;*

8. Neither is Covetousness the only Vice that serves its Interest upon Religion : But as it is made a Factor for that, so it is a Cloak and Disguise for many other. Of this the Catalogues of primitive Hereticks give sufficient Witness ; divers whereof, as the *Nicolaitans*, *Cerinthians*, *Carpocratians* and *Gnosticks*, seem to have constituted distinct Sects in Christianity, only that they might introduce the most bestial Parts of Heathenism, and pretend an Association in Religion, when indeed it was in Lust. How far some of our modern Sects resemble them in this Particular, I will not undertake to pronounce, though there want not those who make severe, and not improbable Conjectures concerning it. But whether that be the main Design or no, it is certain both that Wickedness, and many other, find great Shelter among them. He that brings Resolution to uphold a Faction, shall not miss of Entertainment, how many or how great Vices soever he brings with it, and he that is of a godly Party, shall, in spite of the loudest Guilt, be a godly Man ; so meritorious a thing is it in some Mens Account to be factious, that it covers the multitude of sins. Hence it is that Criminals so frequently fly to new Churches for Sanctuary : And it will still be the Concern of such

to have so creditable a Refuge; and therefore we are not to wonder if this Interest combine with the former in promoting our Dissensions.

9. But, alas, as it advances those, so does it our Guilt too, that have more than one vile End to which we accommodate our Piety, and still implies the greater Affront to our God, by how many the more and baser Interests we shrowd under his Patronage. Alas, is it not enough, as *Job* speaks, to *hide our iniquities in our own bosoms*, but must we wrap them in the Veil of the Sanctuary? We read that *Goats* once lent a Covering for the Tabernacle; but here, by an impious Inversion, the Tabernacle must lend a Covering to the Goats; the most bestial Appetites be both concealed and preserved under the Shadow of Religion. *Plutarch* tells us, that when *Marcellus* would have consecrated a Temple jointly to Honour and Virtue, the Priests resisted it, saying, *two Gods dwell not in one Church*. And if their vain Deities exacted such a Solemnity of Respect, and would not be Inmates to one another, can we think the true God will be content to be made so to all our vilest Lusts? This is, sure, the highest Contumely to the divine Majesty; and never could the Abomination of Desolation more properly be said to stand in the holy Place than in this Sense; for, as the Natures of these Guilts are fitly expressed by Abomination, so is the Effect of them by Desolation, they having brought the most fatal Mischiefs on the Church.

10. And now would God all that are concerned in this Guilt, *the Guilt whereof* would soberly ponder the *ought seriously to* Weight of it. There are two *be weighed and* things of which God has expressed himself peculiarly tender, his *pondered by us all.* Honour and his Church; this is the invading him in



both ; the exposing the one to Reproach and Contempt, and the other to Ruin and Destruction ; and, doubtless, were there nothing of the former, this latter alone must be sadly accounted for. It remains yet a Character of Infamy upon *Achan*, that he troubled *Israel* to enrich himself : And on *Balaam*, that he not only loved the wages of iniquity, but ensnared the people in uncleanness : And sure the same, with many Aggravations, belong to those, who by the like unworthy Practice, have not only rendered the Church a Prey to Foreigners, but made it so to itself, engaged one Part of it against another, till the whole is so wasted, that our Religion seems now nearer Extinction, than our Quarrels about it.

## C H A P. XVI.

*A Survey of the Causes of Disputes ; fourthly, Passion.*

*Passion a fourth Cause of our Divisions.*

I. **A** Fourth grand Contributor to our Dissensions is Passion, which being by God and Nature placed in a Subserviency to Reason, when it quits its proper Station and assumes Empire, it must needs disorder and subvert not only the State of the Mind, but of every Thing upon which it has an Influence. I shall not here attempt any philosophical Discourse either of their Nature or Number ; all that concerns the present Enquiry falls under one of these two, our Love, or our Hate, and is either Kindness and Prepossession, or Spite and Prejudice : For the first of these, it is a thing which common Experience attests to be a most forcible Corrupter of the Understanding, which being by native Right designed

signed a Judge, is by this interrupted in its Office, not permitted to make those impartial Enquiries on which a right Sentence should be founded : But (as it fares sometimes with Magistrates in popular Insurrections) forced to give Countenance to its own Violation, to own not its proper native Dictates, but such as are presented to it by the prejudicate Fancy. And as it thus lays Restraint upon the superior Part of the Mind, keeps the Understanding in Fetters, so (to complete the Inversion) it takes off all Ties from the inferior, gives not only Licence, but Incitation to the other Passions to take their freest Range, to act with the utmost Impetuosity. And sure there can nothing more be required, to render it a most apt Instrument of Tumult and Confusion. For when every Opinion that is taken up, shall, instead of Reason and Argument, arm itself with Heat and Violence, there can be no End of contending. And the Truth of this is, God knows, too sadly discernible in our Church-controversies, which derive a great deal of their Warmth and Bitterness from this Fountain.

2. Of this Prepossession there are two sorts, the one relating to Doctrine, the other to Persons ; by the first, I mean not a sober Constancy to those Principles which, being first imbibed by Education, are afterwards retained upon Judgment, but an eager Tenacity of Opinions, not so much upon Truth or Evidence, as upon a confused irrational Kindness ; a *Platonick* Love of some Doctrines merely for themselves, and then making them the Standards by which all others are to be measured : And this kind of Prepossession is no Stranger in the World, there being Multitudes of Men, who assert Opinions with  
all

*Prepossession and Kindness to Mens Persons and Doctrines hath given Countenance to many ancient Errors.*

all imaginable Vehemence, who can give no better Ground of it, but because they like them: And as the wiser sort choose a Tenet because it is right, so these conclude it is right because they have chosen it. And having thus enamoured themselves of their *Helena*, they expect all should adore, nor can he escape the Note of Profaneness that refuses. By this absurd Partiality it is, that some Doctrines which would themselves ill abide the Test, are become the Touch-stone both of Doctrines and Men, and no Opinion or Person sanctified which bears not this Impress. I need not stand to give Instances, either of the Doctrines or the unhappy Influence this espousing of them has had on our Dissensions; but, indeed, this kind of Prepossession is oftentimes the Consequent of another; and this great Veneration of some Opinions is founded in the Reverence of their Authors. Men take up a Confidence of the Learning or Sanctity of a Person, and then all his Notions are received implicitly, strictly embraced, but not so much as slightly examined, and this Admiration of Mens Persons, has, in all Ages, been of huge Mischief to the Church, has nursed up private Fancies into solemn publick Errors, and given an unhappy Perpetuity to many heterodox Opinions, which would else have expired with their first Propugners. This seems to have been foreseen by St. Paul, when he so earnestly exhorts the *Corinthians* against the ascribing their Faith to their several respective Teachers: But sure I am, it was sadly experimented by the succeeding Christians, who owed many of their Divisions to it. A pregnant Instance hereof was the Millennium, which, in spite of its Improbability, prevailed long, and almost universally, against the Truth, upon the Strength of Authority. *Papias*, a holy Man, and Scholar of St. John, having delivered it, the Esteem of his Person canonized his Mistake,

Mistake, and Men chose rather to admit a Doctrine, whose Unagreeableness to the Gospel-æconomy rendered it suspicious, than think an apostolick Man could seduce them. And the Force of this is yet more considerable, when it is remembered that it found Profelytes, not only among the Vulgar, who are commonly flexible to any new Impression, but among those of a higher Rank, Men that were Lights in their Generation : *Justin Martyr* and *Ira-neus* having owned the Opinion, and intimated it to have been received by many others no less orthodox ; and if such a Seduction could prevail so early in those purer Times, before Mens Interests or Spleen were adopted into their Religion, and begot voluntary Errors, if, I say, the mere Reputation of a Teacher was then singly so operative, we cannot wonder at its Efficacy, in Conjunction with those Auxiliaries which worser Times have brought in. What Concurrence of those there was in the several Heresies, which after infested the Church, I shall not now examine, but it is visible that many of them grew considerable, chiefly from the Fame of their Authors ; thus *Tatianus*, upon the Credit of being *Justin Martyr's* Disciple, had an Advantage to disseminate his Errors, and not only his, but those of *Origen*, *Apollinaris*, and *Novatus*, gained Abettors from the reputed Orthodoxy of the Persons that proposed them, who having asserted the Faith in some Points, were qualified the more prosperously to oppose it in others.

3. Nor has it been only the Mishap of elder Times to have felt the Mischiefs of such Prepossession ; the Disease has still advanced, and every Day improved in worse Effects, by how much Men have more degene-

*Many blindly give up their Faith and Conscience to the Conduct of their admired Teachers;*

rated



rated from primitive Integrity; so that the easy Profelyte is now in Danger, not only from the Blindness, but the Treachery of his Guide, and is often led out of the common Road, as Thieves draw Passengers into By-ways, for the better Opportunity of robbing them: But it is not my present Business to send Hue and Cry after them, to examine what the Intentions of those Leaders are; who misguide their tractable admiring Followers; it is enough for my Purpose to observe, that those who so deliver up themselves in a blind Assent to the Dictates of any Man, are in his Power to be abused by him if he pleases; I shall leave it to others, to estimate the Probability that they shall not be actually so: But certainly this may be said, that these later Ages have, beyond all the former, given Opportunities of seducing to any that will use them. The one established Doctrine of Infallibility among the *Romanists*, is eminent for its Propriety that Way, while under pretence of Submission to something they call *infallible*, it is evident that the Faith of the ignorant Vulgar resolves itself into that which they acknowledge most fallible, the Doctrine of their immediate Teachers. But, indeed, take it at the best, such a Persuasion is not only an Error in itself, and an apt Foundation for innumerable others, but it necessarily renders them incorrigible; the least Retraction of a Mistake being so inconsistent with the Claim of Infallibility, that, while they retain the one, they must never attempt the other, nor can they cease to err, till they confess it possible they may do so. How much more than possible that has been, the many Innovations of that Church sufficiently witness, and, consequently, the Danger of presuming upon the Unerrableness of a Guide. But would all that upbraid it there, were themselves secure from it, and that many did not in their

their Practice transcribe that decried Doctrine, and that too with the Improvement of worse Circumstances. I must call them worse, by how much the Probabilities of Erring are greater under the extemporary Conduct of a private Person, than the fixed Rules of a Community, and by how much again the voluntary enslaving myself is more excuseless, than that which the Principles of my Profession, and consequently a seeming Obligation of Conscience exposes me to. And as to the Matter of Fact, I think it is evident enough, that the Admiration of Mens Persons is a spreading Disease that has over-run Christendom; and though a great Part of it inveigh against implicit Faith, yet if it be thoroughly scanned, it will appear it is rather the Object than the Act we differ about. He that vehemently opposes that Homage to the Conclave, will yet tamely pay it to a *Classis*; and he that refuses it there, yields it to the Votes of a Congregational Church; or, if he hold out against that too, yet chooses to himself some private Teacher on which to cast it, like *Micah*, *Judges xvii.* makes him a *Teraphim* and a Priest too, for his private Use, and then confidently consults his Oracle, and has nothing to do but believe its Responses. Nay, that which makes the Matter yet more sadly ridiculous, is, that the very Opposition to one Usurpation makes them deliver themselves up to another. How many, when they have heard a Preacher rail fiercely at the Pope, have presently made him theirs, and supposing that Zeal an Indication of a safe Guide, have given him as absolute a Rule of their Consciences, as that he exclaimed against (perhaps envied) elsewhere? And the like Instances might be given among our other dissenting Parties. And this has taught some Seducers a lucky Artifice, made them observe to what Opinions their Profelytes had the greatest Aversion,

Aversion, and, by complying with their Anger, so steal away their Love, that they might after lead them to what they pleased, yea, perhaps, to that which they so much detested: For there want not Examples of some, who have by Back-ways been brought to those Opinions, which at first they most defied. What have been the Attempts or Success of the Emisseries of *Rome* this Way, I shall not pronounce, though some (not improbably) speak them great.

*and choose to denominate themselves from the Name of a particular Sect, as if they were ashamed of that of Christian.*

4. From this blind and passionate Esteem of several Teachers have flowed many pernicious Consequents, particularly those distinct Appellations which form Differences into Sects, many of which expressly own this Original, by bearing the Names of their first Authors. I might here put them in mind, that they are illegitimate Persons, whom our Law directs to write with an *alias*, and ask them, *Whether the Church, from their superinduced Name, has not Cause so to repute them?* But I am sure I may, with the utmost Seriousness, say, that this Practice is to the great Violation of Christian Unity, and Reproach of Christian Profession, which seems to be abandoned and disowned by us, who, instead of denominating ourselves from the *author and finisher of our faith*, find out new Patrons, as if we were ashamed of our first Relation. Alas, how is the Title of *Christian*, which was so glorious to the primitive Owners, that they gladly bought the Occasion of boasting it with Torments and Death, become so despicable to us, that every the obscurest Name is courted to supplant it! Have any of our idolized Readers bought their Interest in us so dear as Christ has done, why then are we rather ambitious

ambitious to be accounted their Dependents than his ? It is the Apostle's own Argument, 1 Cor. i. 12. when he refutes their factious intitling themselves to *Paul* and *Apollos*, &c. by asking them if *Paul* were crucified for them : And, indeed, he there says so much upon this Point, that I need only refer the Reader thither to learn, either the Unreasonableness of this schismatical Zeal for our several Teachers, or the inevitable Contentions and Animosities which spring from it ; only let me observe, that every of his Arguments are more pressing upon us, than on the *Corinthians* ; those taken from the Unreasonableness sure are, by how much the Names we so adore are less venerable than those of *Paul* and *Cephas* and *Apollos* ; and those from the Consequences are so also. For those Teachers were industrious to prevent, whereas ours commonly are no less busy to promote Contentions on their Behalf, and so we are more ascertained never to want them.

5. But beside this kinder Prepossession towards some Mens *Prejudice and* Persons, there is another of a *Dislike hath likewise given Birth* different Nature, a sinister one. *I mean Prejudice and Disgust ; to many Heresies* and this has done no less Harm *in the Church,* in ecclesiastical Affairs than the former. Men take up Piques and Displeasures at others, and then every Opinion of the disliked Person must partake of his Fate, and be engaged in the Quarrel : Nor will those that are Enemies ever allow one another the Honour of being in the right : Nay, some have been so perversely malicious, that they have given up their Understandings to their Spleen, forsaken an Opinion themselves approved, only that they might find Matter of Contest with one they maligned. A memorable Instance of this



*Socrates* gives in his *Echl. Hist.* in *Theophilus* Bishop of *Alexandria*, who having formerly attested the orthodox Belief, that God was incorporeal, yet, upon a sudden Indignation against *Dioscorus* and his Brethren, who maintained the Tenet, he embraced the contrary Heresy of the *Anthropomorphites*, that so, under the Colour of a Difference in Faith, he might the more advantageously pursue his Malice ; and the Effects of it were very tragical, not only to private Persons, in Tumult and Bloodshed, but to the Church, by reviving that Error, which was before near expiring, and might, as *Socrates* affirms, have lain in the Dust, had it not been thus awakened. And indeed in Church-story, scarce any thing occurs more frequently than Examples of those, who, upon private Grudges, have either begun or fomented Heresies and Schisms. Thus *Marcion* being denied the Communion of the *Roman* Church, having before, by a scandalous Crime, been cut off from his own, he revenged himself by publishing his detestable Doctrine : In like Manner *Miletus*, upon a Displeasure at *Peter* Bishop of *Alexandria*, first separated from the Church, and after took part with the *Arians* : So also *Lucifer*, incensed at *Eusebius* for not approving of his electing *Paulus* to the See of *Antioch*, broke Communion, and gave both Rise and Denomination to a new Sect. The like is said of *Apollinaris*, that he was excited to the broaching his Heresy by his Impatience of the Excommunication inflicted on him and his Father, by *Theodotus* Bishop of *Laodicea* ; and several others might be given to the same Purpose, out of the Records of those first Ages.

and hath mightily  
inflamed our pre-  
sent Differences  
and Dissensions.

6. And certainly the World seems not to have so much improved in Meekness since, as that we should think the same Principle

Principle is not still as active ; and if the Task were not more envious than hard, many recent Instances might be given to parallel the former, especially of such as having justly sinacted under the Stroke of ecclesiastical Discipline, have sought to revenge themselves both on it and the Inflictors, by Factions and Tumules ; so making the Publick at once cloak the Infamy, and bear the Charge of their particular Rancours. But this is a Subject neither grateful, nor necessary to be more distinctly spoken to. One may, however, in the general, say, that where these private Animosities are any thing violent, they usually beat down all Consideration of publick Good. Historians observe of *Themistocles*, that he always thwarted the Counsels of *Aristides*, not that he thought it the Interest of the Commonwealth, but his own, to keep down the growing Reputation of his Competitor : And I fear that envious Artifice has been too often transcribed, as well in Ecclesiastick as in Civil Transactions : No Detriment is thought so formidable to a malicious Mind, as the Prosperity of his Adversary ; and publick Ruptures shall still be allowed to widen, till they swallow up the whole, rather than he will close with his Antagonist. The History of the *Scottish Church* gives an apposite Example of this in a ruling Presbyter, who being by King *James* advised with about the re-admitting *Marquis Huntley*, and pressed with the present Exigencies of Church and State, which required it, gave his final Answer in these Terms : *Well, Sir, I see you resolve to take Huntley in favour, if you do, I will oppose it, choose whether you will lose him or me, for both you cannot have.* Some may think the greatest Propriety of this Instance lies to shew the Insolence of that Tribe towards Majesty ; but however, it is not impertinent to the Matter in hand also ; and shews how light the

E e 2

greatest

greatest publick Concerns are, when Malice is the Counterpoize: And indeed the Naturalists experiment, that Flame will not mingle with Flame, never justifies itself better than when applied to Minds thus accended, which, however they may meet in mutual Flashes, can never unite and incorporate: The Sadness of it is, that they should only conspire to common Vastation, and make the Church itself a Burnt-offering.

*Our Passions  
have been fatal  
both to our  
Church and Re-  
ligion.*

7. Thus fatal have our several sorts of Prepossessions been to our Religion, for as if that were the common Enemy; our most distant contrary Affections, our Love and our Hate equally annoy it; those brutish Parts of us, our Passions, which like the Beasts under the Law, were never to be brought into the Temple, but for Sacrifice, are now found there upon a far differing Account, not to be slain, but adored; like the *Aegyptian Isis and Osiris*, enshrined to receive our Devotions; for that the Zeal we pretend elsewhere is really paid to them, is, alas, too manifest.

---

#### C H A P. XVII.

*A Survey of the Causes of Disputes; fifthly, Zeal.*

*Mistaken Zeal hath  
been another Cause  
of our Breaches  
and Divisions,*

I. **T**O these several Causes of our Distractions we may add another, which, tho' in its Original, it may seem more innocent, yet is, in its Consequents, no less pernicious; and that is a mistaken Zeal; which, as it is Fire to all about it, so is it Wind to itself, fans and irritates its

its own Flames, and by a Confidence that it does well, gathers still fresh Vigour to do more. How great the Force of such an erroneous Persuasion is, we may collect from our Saviour's Premonition to his Disciples, when he tells them, that *those who killed them should think they did God service*; and if Murder, and that of Apostles too, could by the Magick of blind Zeal, be so transformed, we must not wonder to find other Crimes so too. And what Christ thus foretold was after eminently exemplified in St. Paul, whom the Holy Writ represents under all the Phrases that may denote a virulent Persecutor, as breathing out Threatnings and Slaughter, making Havock of the Church, and in his own Words, *persecuting that way unto the death*, and being exceedingly mad against them; and all this he did being zealous towards God, and out of a Persuasion that he ought to do many things contrary to the Name of Jesus, as we find in his Apology to his Countrymen and King Agrippa, *Acts xxii. 2. and xxvi. 9.*

2. And of the Abettors of those novel Doctrines which after-times produced, we have Reason to think many were of this sort, especially in those Heresies, which though they carried secret Venom in them, had yet a plausible Appearance of Sanctity and Devotion; such was that of the *Enchrates*, which seemed to be founded in the Veneration of two great Virtues, Continence and Temperance, though by extending them beyond the due Limits, they lost that Sobriety they too strictly embraced, and became inordinate in their Continence, and excessive in their Abstinence: Such again were the *Euchites* or *Messalians*, who made the whole Business not only of Religion, but even of



Life, to consist in praying ; and though by it they evacuated all other Ends of both, yet having the Letter of a Precept, and the Pretence of Devotion on their Side, it was a proper Bait for those who had much Zeal and little Knowledge. In like manner the *Novatian* Heresy had so glorious an Inscription of Purity, as was very apt to attract well-meaning Souls ; who seeing it bid such express Defiance to Apostasy, could not suspect that it was itself any Defection from the Faith ; and, accordingly, some of that Sect approved their Constancy in Times both of Heathen and *Arian* Persecutions. Nor must we be so uncharitable to the modern Times, as not to believe many have acted upon the like Principles, and meant Truth and Piety, even while they actually promoted the contrary. But how sincere soever the Purposes of such seduced Persons were, yet it is evident the Church has suffered no less by them, than by the more crafty Designers : Their misguided Piety has made as great and incurable Ruptures, as the most flagitious Blasphemies of others. And when a Rent is once made, it matters little, whether it were done by Error or Malice ; nay, perhaps, as to the Hopes of Repairing, the former may be the more desperate. For whereas he that knowingly commits an Ill, has the Upbraidings of his own Conscience towards his redressing ; these, on the other side, have its Cheatings and Encouragements, to confirm and animate them. And, doubtless, they are great Advantages which Satan has, in all Ages, made of such Persons, whom he seems to have deluded in the same Manner that *Medea* is said to have done the Daughters of *Peleeas*, whom she persuaded to hack their aged Father in Pieces, in Hope, that by her Magick, he should not only recover Life, but Youth : So these rend and tear their Mother, the Church, out of a Hope :

Hope no less delusive, of restoring her pristine Beauty and Vigour; how far the Event parallels it also, the dying State of Christianity does too sadly testify.

3. Nor has it only been the Heat of erring Persons that has been thus mischievous, but sometimes Men of right Judgments have too much contributed to the Breach of Unity, and the intemperate and imprudent Zeal of these hath served to exasperate the mistaking Earnestness of the other: This happens sometimes for want of distinguishing between the Essentials and Circumstantial of Religion, and so looking upon a Mistake in the latter with the Detestation proper only to the perverting of the former; by this means, those who have entirely embraced the same Faith, have yet violated Charity and broken Communion: Such slight minute Differences, when managed by eager Spirits, being easily blown up into solemn and lasting Contentions; so that the Disputes raised about some Pin or Nail of the Temple, have sometimes shaken and endangered the whole Fabrick, robbed the Church of that fraternal Unity which was its fastest Cement; and surest Support. Of this we need no more apt Instance from Antiquity than that which has been already mentioned upon another Occasion, I mean *Victor's* unbrother-like Heat towards the Eastern Churches in the Controversy about Easter, which had fomented that Difference into a Schism, which the meeker Piety of his Predecessors thought no Ground of Unkindness, much less of Separation, as *Irenaeus* more at large tells him; and, probably, had Men, in all the succeeding Ages, deliberately poised the Errors they opposed, and proportioned their Displeasure but to the

the just Weight of them, many of our Disputes would have been so calmed, that they should never have become Quarrels. But many, in this Particular, have only used the Touch-stone, not the Scales, and of Opinions that are erroneous, consider not which are more or less pernicious, but with an equal Violence fly at all, as if the Stoical Opinion concerning Sins had prevailed in Errors also, and that all were resolved to be of the same Size.

*Several Errors and Heresies have been propagated by a too hot and eager Contentions about them.*

4. But even in those of the highest Kind it may perhaps be doubted, whether too eager an Opposition have not sometimes done Hurt, especially in those Doctrines which relate to the mysterious Parts of Religion, wherein a Novelty is at first

looked upon with some Horror, and many are willing rather to condemn in gross than nicely to examine; who yet, when they find this done for them by orthodox Persons, they think they may, with such a Guide, venture to wade into the Question, where many times the Insinuations of Error are so subtle, that all their Antidotes secure them not from Infection, but they are themselves captivated where they expected only to triumph. Neither want there those of the Vulgar, that are of a more insolent Temper; and out of a Vanity of making themselves Umpires between learned Men, greedily read the Writings of both Parties, who yet are able to make no solid Judgment of either; and when it is remembered how many popular Artifices there are to bias such Persons, we must confess that Truth hath many to one Odds against her; besides, publick Arguing oft serves not only to exasperate the Minds, but to whet the Wits of Hereticks, and by shewing them the weak Parts of their Doctrines,

prompts

prompts them to rally all their Sophistry to fortify them, that what they want of Truth and Reason, may be supplied with Fallacy and little Colours; and Experience shews how fitly that kind of Logick is accommodated to the greatest Part of the World. In short, it seems not improbable, that many Heresies owe much of their Growth to the improper Means of eradicating them, and have acquired a Reputation from the Stir that was made about them. Thus *Socrates* tells us, that *Alexander's* Letters about the *Arian* Heresy served to scatter that pestilent Infection the more abroad, and combined Men into Parties, so that the whole World became the Scene of that long Tragedy, which possibly might have had a shorter and better Issue, had not the Notice of the Controversy been so early dispersed.

5. But if the Attempts of the Pen have often proved so unfit, *Religion not to be propagated by Arms, though the Zeal of the late Times did so;* it may be considered whether those of the Sword are not more so, and Fighting be not a worse Expedient than Disputing: And certainly we have great Reason to conclude in the Affirmative, if we weigh either the Injustice or Unreasonableness of it. I know there want not those who have thought the propagating Religion by Arms not only lawful but meritorious, and that, in order to the planting it in a Nation, the Soil may be mellowed with the Blood of the Inhabitants; nay, the old extirpated, and new Colonies planted. But we are to remember, that as God is the universal Monarch of the World, so we have all the Relation of Fellow-subjects to him, and can pretend no farther Jurisdiction over each other, than what he has delegated to us: And sure it would be hard to produce any Commission from him for the invading a Nation, only because it  
is



is not of our Faith. It is sure those to whom he first intrusted the promulgating of the Gospel, had far different Instructions, and it were fit our new Evangelists should shew their later Authority for this sanguinary Method; in order to which, tho' some have made use of the Opinion of some Schoolmen, that *Dominion is founded in Grace*, yet as that is but an Opinion, so were it admitted as the most certain Truth, it could never warrant any Enterprize of this kind: For supposing that a People, by wanting spiritual Blessings, did lose all their Right to temporal, yet that Forfeiture must devolve only to the supreme Lord; and when as God, in another Case, asks, where is the *bill of divorce*? *Isaiah* l. 1. so we may demand of these zealous Invaders, where is the *bill of assignment*, by which that Right was transferred to them? In short, Peace is the most valuable Blessing of human Life, and we cannot without Injustice, deprive Men of it, though we could, as we pretend, give them Truth in lieu of it; for mangre the Proverb, that *Exchange will still be Robbery*, where the Parties are compelled to make it. But, alas, it is a vain Imagination to think, that Religion can be thus imposed: or that we can bind the Understandings and Wills of Men, with the same Fetters we do their Bodies; it is true, indeed, the Apostle tells us, *there is a way of bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*; but he tells us, withal, that the Weapons by which that Victory is atchieved, *are not carnal*, *2 Cor. x. 4*. Indeed, did Religion consist only in some external Conformities, external Force might bear some Proportion to it (which perhaps is the Cause that the one is most used by those whose Religion is most eminent for the other) but it is seated in those Faculties to which outward Violence can have no Access. Alas, it is not whole Armies can besiege

besiege my Reason, nor Cannons batter my Will, it is Conviction, not Force, that must induce Assent ; and sure the Logick of a conquering Sword has no great Propriety that Way ; silence indeed it may, but convince it cannot ; its Efficacy rather lies on the other Side, breeds Aversion and Abhorrence of that Religion, whose first Address is in Blood and Rapine : Nor do such Attempts gain any thing to the Cause but the Infamy of those Rigours which are used to promote it. And sure, since this Piece of *Mahometan* Zeal has been transplanted into Christianity, it has been much more mischievous than in its native Soil, Christianity having been infinitely more oppressed by those that thus fought for it, than those that were in Arms against it. Whether upon this Score the Pope have not done her more Harm than the *Turk*, I leave to Consideration.

6. But what is here said of the military Sword, I intend not should be applied to the civil ; for I treat not here of those legal Punishments which Magistrates inflict upon their disobedient Subjects, who indeed may justly, nay, indeed, must necessarily require Conformity to ecclesiastical Laws, as well as the civil ; the Eruptions in the one commonly overflowing the other also, and Schism usually ending in Rebellion ; so that it is apparently their Interest to guard themselves from those riotous Effects of pretended Zeal ; nor is it less their Duty, they being, as the Ancients express it, *Custodes utriusque tabule* ; in St. Paul's Language, the ministers of God, *Rom. xiii.* and in *Constantine's* Dialect, *Επίσκοποι ὡς τὰ ἔξω*, Bishops in the whole outward Administration of the Church, and, if Heresy or Schism be a Sin, are by their

*yet Magistrates  
may use the Sword  
to defend Religion,  
and punish the  
Violation thereof,  
when once legally  
established.*

their Places obliged to approve themselves Avengers, to execute Wrath no less there than in other Circumstances ; and that they are Sins, and of no small Bulk, none can doubt, that observes *Heresy* ranked, *Gal. v.* with *Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Murders*, and other Sins of the Flesh, or Schism, marked out by the Apostle to the *Hebrews*, as a kind of petrifying Crime, which induces that Induration, to which the fearful Expectation of Wrath is consequent ; for so we find, *Heb. x. 26.* that *for-saking the assemblies* is looked on as previous to Apostasy and final Defection ; and therefore, sure, the Magistrate can do nothing kinder, even to the Offenders, than, by taking their Sin early, prevent that fatal Growth of it. But (that his just Power thus rescued) I may assume my former Assertion, and conclude, that all other Violences are so far from advancing Christianity, that they extremely weaken and disadvantage it.

7. But of no sort is this more  
*Popular Heats and Tumults are but an ill Way of reforming Errors.* eminently true than of those popular Heats, where the People undertake to chastise Error : For besides that the Outrages then committed are very apt to avert

Men even from Truths which they see so barbarously defended, it often happens, that the Multitude take causeless Alarms, and think their Faith is invaded when it is not. A memorable Instance of this kind *Euagrius* gives in his ecclesiastical History, where he tells us, that the Emperor *Anastasius* having added to the *Trisagium* this Clause, *who was crucified for our Salvation*, the whole City of *Constantinople* was in an Uproar, upon an ignorant Jealousy that those Words had some heretical Meaning, in which Fury they happening to light upon a poor silly Monk, they immediately kill him as the In-ventor

ventor of that Clause, and a Conspirer against the Trinity : So unhappily absurd are the Transports of wild Zeal, which, where it rules, does, besides the direct Mischiefs of Tumult and Sedition, create others at the Rebound, which are more permanent, and discompose and embitter Mens Spirits, and render them so ambitiously greedy of Quarrels for their Religion, that they are not only prepared to receive, but to seek Encounters : And it is too sure they can never be wanting to Persons of such Tempers, since the Adversaries of Truth cannot have more Advantage or Encouragement against it than this unpeaceable Humour of those that profess it.

8. By these several Ways has it come to pass, that even that Zeal which should be the Life of Christianity, is become its Disease ; and Religion, like a hectic Body, is consumed by its own Heats, if, at least, I may call those its own, which derive

*A too eager and violent Zeal is injurious to Religion, and opposite to the Meekness of the Gospel.*

not from its proper and native Constitution, but are the Accidents of its declining State : For how confidently soever Men pronounce of themselves, and believe that they are then most pious, when they are most eager and unquiet ; yet it is sure this is far removed from the true Genius and Temper of Religion, which, like the God it worships, makes its Approaches, not in Winds and Earthquakes, but in the *still small voice*, 1 Kings xix. 12. And when it is considered, that the greatest Part of the evangelical Law is made up of Precepts of Meekness, Long-suffering and Condescension, we must conclude that Zeal very preposterous, that pretends to obey by violating them, or to establish Religion by undermining the most essential Parts of it : And to Persons under that Mistake, we may most properly



apply the Reproof given by *Christ* to his Disciples upon the same Occasion, *You know not what manner of spirit you are of.*

*Our fierce and unnatural Heats are oft mistaken for true Christian Zeal.*

9. It will therefore become Men to look with Jealousy on themselves in this Particular ; not too confidently to pursue every Incitation which carries a Shew of Piety, but soberly to weigh how it agrees with the Rules and Oeconomy of that Gospel for which it pretends so much Concern ; for tho' the true Christian Zeal can never be too much cherished ; yet alas, it is not every Warmth we feel about Religion that can own that Title ; and sure we do not more often, or more fatally, mistake any thing, than in applying that venerable Name to things of a far inferior, nay sometimes of a contrary Nature. How often, upon this Error, have Men ascribed that to their Piety which they owed to their Complexions, and thought it was their Religion made them earnest, when it was merely their Constitution : Nay, how often has Satan taken this Advantage of transforming himself into an *angel of light*, and insinuating his Illusions under this Disguise. And truly they must still be liable to both these Deceits, so long as they place the Essence of Christian Zeal in Heat and Eagerness. It is true, indeed, it has its Heats, but actuated in a far different Way ; it has Flames of Love, not of Anger ; to melt, not consume our Enemies ; and makes us apter to pour out our own Blood a Sacrifice to Truth than *that of gainsayers*. In short, if it be a Fire, it is that pure elemental, which the Peripateticks talk of, which is but of a moderate Heat, apt to cherish, not devour.

10. And

10. And would God Men would ſo far believe this, as to think there may be Moderation, without the Danger of *Laodicean Lukewarmneſs*, and, upon that Suppoſition, ſuffer themſelves to cool into a treatable Temper, and then I ſhould humbly offer to them theſe few Conſiderations :

11. Firſt, the great and univerſal Fallibility of human Nature, which renders it not only poſſible that we may, but certain that every one of us ſhall err in ſomething or other ; and this ſure is very proper to perſuade Lenity to thoſe whom we find actually erring. It is the Apoſtle's Argument in the Caſe of Sin, *Gal. vi. 1. Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are ſpiritual, reſtore ſuch a one in the ſpirit of meekneſs ; conſidering thyſelf, leſt thou alſo be tempted.* Where the common Peccability of Mankind is urged to induce Commiſeration and Gentleneſs towards the Offenders ; and if this be of Force in Sin, where the Concurrence of the Will renders the Perſon more inexcusable, it will ſurely hold much more in bare Error, which being purely involuntary, (for nothing is properly Error, farther than it is ſo) it is to be looked on rather as the Diſeaſe than Crime of the Perſon : And ſince we uſe not to exclaim againſt Men for being ſick, but compaſſionately to endeavour their Recovery, why ſhould we here uſe ſo much a contrary Method ? It is true, indeed, it is neceſſary ſometimes, in order to the Cure, and ſometimes for preventing the Infection of others, to do ſome things uneaſy to the Patient ; and what tends regularly to either of theſe Ends, may, in this

*The Fallibility of human Nature ought to be an Argument to Charity and Moderation towards thoſe that differ from us.*

Case, also be charitably done, by those that have Authority ; but that differs as far from our usual Severities, as the Lancings of a Physician do from the Wounds of an Adversary, or publick Discipline from private Spleen : So that, notwithstanding this, we may resume our Conclusion, and infer from the Errableness of our Nature, the Reasonableness of Compassion to the Seduced. And as it thus prompts us to look gently upon others, so also to reflect impartially upon ourselves, and consider how possible it is, that, even whilst we condemn others, we may indeed be in the wrong, and then all the Invectives we make at their supposed Errors, fall back with a rebounded Force upon our real ones. If this Possibility were but adverted to, it would make us less positive and dogmatical in our Opinions, and so consequently take away one main Ground of Contention : For though we often quarrel about Matters, which are indeed but conjectural, yet not till we esteem them otherwise ; and when we consider how many Men have vehemently believed apparent Falsehoods, it may well allay our Confidences in all those Cases, where we have not some firmer Ground than our own (or indeed any human) Judgment to build on it.

*Prudence should direct us to the fittest Means for the reducing those that be in an Error.*

12. As for those who have the surest Grounds of Persuasion, and by their Security of being themselves in the Truth, have the more Reason to be earnest in propagating it to others : Let them, in the second place, consider how necessary it is to choose appropriate Means to that good End, without which they do but undermine themselves, and defeat their own Aims. Indeed, Prudence is not only a Moral but Christian Virtue ; and such as is necessary to the constituting

constituting of all others : Without it Devotion degenerates into Superstition, Liberality into Profane-ness, and this of Zeal becomes only a pious kind of Frensy. And of Persons so possessed, God may say as *Achish* did of *David*, 1 *Sam.* xxi. 15. *have I need of madmen ?* No sure, the Defence of Truth is too noble a Cause to be so managed ; its Champions are not like Men in a Fray, to make every thing a Weapon that they can first snatch up, and lay on as Chance or Fury guides, but are deliberately to consult the properest Expedients, use not only Force but Stratagem against the Enemy, and yet, withal, to take care that while they oppose one, another gain not Advantage : For, alas, it is indifferent to our grand Adversary, by which of his Temptations we fall, and if, by subverting the Faith of some, he shipwreck the Charity of others, he has his End, and triumphs at once both over the speculative and practick Part of our Religion.

13. And this may induce a farther Consideration, and prompt us to examine what Degree of Guilt lies on those who, either out of a blind, or rash Zeal, have given him this Advantage. *Blind and rash Zeal many times betrays us into great Errors and Miscarriages.*

And here, though I cannot doubt, but God makes great Allowances to the Miscarriages of sincere Intentions, yet perhaps we have carved more liberally to ourselves than he designs us, and presume our Security greater than in Truth it is. For how innocent soever a good Purpose may make our Error, yet it is a Privilege beyond all Possibility of Grant, that our Sins should be so also ; therefore, if our Misperceptions beget wicked Practice, we may be accountable for the one, though not for the other. We find, indeed, *St. Paul* acknowledges his Ignorance, as the Cause of his finding



Mercy for his persecuting the Church, but we are to remember what that Mercy he there refers to is, not that of Absolution, but Conversion: And had he resisted the latter, though with never so full a Persuasion of his doing well in it, I much doubt whether his good Meaning would have secured him the former; so that all the Encouragement that Example can afford is, that God may probably do more for the reducing an erring than a malicious Persecutor: And when it is considered that all the Odds that Christ makes between him that does ill knowingly and ignorantly, is in the Number of Stripes; we must resolve our Mistakes are no such Amulets as totally to secure us. And then, whether our Guilt shall not swell in proportion to the Ills we do, is a Question that sure can never be resolved in the negative: For if a good Intention cannot alter the Nature of Sin, sure it can as little change their Degree, or make that of two Persons equally mistaken, the Murder of the one shall not be a greater Crime than an intemperate Speech of the other. And upon this Measure the Accounts of erring Zeal are like to rise very high with many, unless we can think Rebellion and Bloodshed, Sacrilege and Schism, with all that Train of zealous Enormities, to be light and trivial.

*Our Zeal for Religion will never excuse the Evil we commit in defence thereof.*

14. Nor will it at all legitimate these, or any other Crimes, tho' they should happen to be committed in the Defence of Truth: Of this St. Peter is a ready Instance, who, when to guard him, who was Truth itself, he had violated the Authority of the Magistrate in wounding an Officer, Christ reprehends his Rashness, and instead of applauding his Zeal, upbraids his Absurdity, that could think his mean Aids considerable.

siderable to him, who could command Legions of Angels to his Rescue. And sure he is not so much more impotent in his Glory, than he was in his Exinanition, as now to need our Sins to secure any of his Concerns; and if St. Peter were thus checked for using that Sword which he was a little before warned to buy, it must sure set an ill Character upon those tumultuous Reformations, which have so much employed the Zeal of later Ages, to which there can never want a Concurrence of several great Sins, the Guilt whereof will scarce be wiped off, by their designed Subserviency to Truth; what Degree of Extenuation it may afford, is hard to pronounce, since we have no Rule to measure it by. But whatsoever it is, we are to remember, that it can belong only to such a Zeal as is purely religious, that mixes not with our Passions or Interests; and therefore, before Men be too forward to appropriate any Indulgence of that kind, it will be necessary to examine, whether no sinister Adherent have vitiated that Integrity of their Purpose, to which alone it can (even by their own Award and Sentence) appertain.

15. I have insisted the more on this, because many are apt to ascribe too unlimitedly to the Force of a good Meaning, to think that is able to bear the Stress of whatsoever Commissions they shall lay on it; and by thus presuming on their Antidote, venture boldly on the deadliest Poisons. To such the foregoing Considerations may be useful; and by robbing them of that imaginary Security, help them to a real one, by making their good Purposes the Director of good Actions, not the Apology for bad. This would make Religion look consonant to itself, which now groans under the Reproach of all those  
Ills

Ills that are acted under its Patronage; and sure to rescue her from such a Scandal, is but a very moderate Piece of Compassion; yet would God she might obtain it, even from those who profess themselves her greatest Votaries: But, alas, it is one sad Circumstance of her Ruin, that she owes it to such; that those Weapons which should defend her, thus recoil into her Bowels, and Zeal should do her more Mischief than Profaneness; for while she is but scoffed at by that, she is wounded by this: Nor are those Wounds ever like to close, till our Zeal grow more balsamick, partake of those healing Qualities of Love and Meekness, the Want whereof has rendered it so unhappily instrumental to our Distractions.

## C H A P. XVIII.

*A Survey of the Causes of Disputes; sixthly, Idleness.*

*Idleness a Cause of our Disputes.*

I. **B**UT as this over-active Humour has done abundant Mischief to the Church, so is it observable, that the direct contrary has done as much; nay, which is yet stranger, the one is frequently the Product of the other, and our too busy Zeal springs from our too great Idleness. How much soever this may sound like Paradox, yet both Reason and Experience attest the Truth of it; for we are to consider that God has put an active Principle into Man, which it is impossible so to suppress, as that there shall be a total Cessation from Motion, and therefore, every intermitting of sober, regular Actings, makes way for wild extravagant ones; for as Nature is said so vehemently to abhor Vacuity, that the very inanimate

mate Bodies would forsake their Specifick Motions to prevent it: So when the Mind is empty, when it has no worthy and profitable Speculation to entertain it, every the most improper and preternatural Object offers itself, and importunately crowds in to fill the Vacuum. This seems to have been well understood, though ill applied by *Pharaoh*, when he thought the *Israelites* Proposal of travelling into the Wilderness to their Devotions, was the Effect of their too great Leisure at home, and therefore increases their Tasks as the properest Way of diverting their Design: And, in like manner, we find those that treat of Politicks, insist upon the Necessity of keeping the People busy, in order to which it is, that they mention the Use of Mathematicks, and other contemplative Sciences, to entertain the active Spirits of a Nation in demonstrating of Problems, solving Phænomenas, and drawing Schemes and Diagrams, who else would be practising upon the Government, making new Ideas and Platforms for the Commonwealth: And doubtless there is Parity of Reason in the ecclesiastick State, which would have been at more Peace, had some Men found themselves other Diversions.

2. And this is confirmed to us by Experiment and Observation of Event; for if we look into the primitive Times, we shall find that when there was a Necessity of defending the common Faith against Heathenism, when Christians were employed in writing Apologies and Vindications, there were much fewer of these intestine Debates (at least such as were metaphysical and purely notional) they had their Hands full of the foreign Enemy, and had the less Temptation to jangle among

*The Church was at greatest Peace and Union within herself, when under Trouble and Persecution from abroad.*



among themselves. So also, when they were under the greatest Storms of Persecution, when the Church was most violently assaulted from without, it had the greatest Calm within. They were then incessantly employed, and busied their Thoughts in preparing for the fiery Trial. Those cloudy Days made them keep close at home, waiting for the Bridegroom's coming; and suffered them not to wander abroad for those unprofitable Curiosities, which, though like Oil, they might nourish Flame, yet would never furnish their Lamps, or gain them Admission to the Wedding; but in the Intervals, and especially after the total Cessation of their Calamity, when their Peace had taken them off their Vigilance, then, while they slept, the envious Man had Advantage to sow his Tares. Rest made them idle, Idleness made them curious, and Curiosity contentious; and those who, under the Tyranny of a *Nero* or *Domitian*, were in perfect Harmony, under the gentle pious Regiment of a *Constantine*, grew to the greatest Discord; and perhaps (besides the divine and extraordinary Supports the Church had in her greatest Conflicts) this may be one of the best natural Accounts how she came to flourish most under her heaviest Pressures.

*Our Divisions  
arise chiefly from  
the Neglect of  
moral and practi-  
cal Duties.*

3. But our Observation ends not here, for besides this extraordinary Importunity of Thoughts, which persecuting Times occasioned, Christianity is, in its Frame and Constitution, an active State, has its standing Business, and besides all accidental, a Series of determinate, constant Employments, sufficient to entertain Mens Minds: From which we may infer, that when this is thoroughly adverted to, there will be few Chasms of Time to be filled with foreign Impertinencies.

Impertinencies. And this gives a clear Account how our Divisions have come to grow upon us, namely, by the Neglect of practick Duties, for as every Age degenerated more from primitive Piety, so they advanced farther in nice Enquiries and new Opinions; and as the Zeal of Practice grew cool, so that of Dispute gathered Heat and Vigour. So that if we consider how far our good Works fall short of the first Christians, we need not wonder to see our Controversies so far exceed them, that Time which was gained from the one, being employed in hammering and forging the other. I do not forget that I have before ranked this Diversion of Christian Practice among the Effects of our Contentions, and foresee it may be thought very inartificial here, to make it the Cause also: But, alas, its Concern in them is so extravagantly great, as to have at once the Relation of Child and Parent, to be both Root and Branch, Fountain and Stream, and, like a Circle, unites in itself Beginning and End; for as it first gave Birth to our Quarrels, so it finally receives Increase from them. In short, our oscitant lazy Piety gave Vacancy for them, and they will now lend none back again for more active Duty. And as this Neglect of our general Calling of Christianity has been thus pernicious, so have the ill Effects thereof been improved by the like ill Attendance on our particular ones. We find *St. Paul* takes notice, that the younger Widows, who deserted their own ecclesiastical Office, grew busy-bodies in the secular Affairs of others; and sure we may with Truth invert the Note, and observe that those, who either desert or neglect their secular Callings, are the most perniciously meddling in ecclesiastical Matters. Did Men conscientiously employ themselves in their honest Occupations, their Minds would be sufficiently diverted, and it would not become the Work of Artificers

Artificers to make new Schemes of Doctrines or Discipline ; Divinity would not then pass the Yard and Loom, the Forge and Anvil, nor Preaching be taken in as an easier supplementary Trade, by those that disliked the Pains of their own. But all this, alas, we have seen to the equal Shame and Detriment of Piety. Mechanicks, of all sorts, have presumed to teach what themselves never learned ; and those that served long Apprenticeships to other Crafts, have become Divines in a Moment, and with the same emulous Industry wherewith they used to invent new Fashions, have made new Religions. And as Idleness has

*Tradesmen, by the Easiness of their Callings, or their slight Managery of them, have been the aptest to run after new Teachers.*

thus made some Preachers, so it has made more Hearers, those who, either by the Easiness of their Callings, or their slight Managery of them, have had the most vacant Time, have been the aptest to run after new Teachers :

Hence it is that Towns and Cities have been the great Nurseries of Faction, the Leisure of Shopmen making them more inquisitive after, and receptive of Novelties. And were that overgrown Zeal of Sermons, which has now devoured all other Parts of Religion, among that sort of Men thoroughly scanned, we should find Idleness goes very far in its Composition ; for besides that Hearing is the most lazy of all religious Offices, as appears by the undisturbed Sleeps Men can take at Sermons ; it is manifest this insatiate Appetite of it, is originally founded either in the not having Business, or not attending to it. For should I ask such Men, whether if Necessity had enforced *St. Paul's Rule* upon them, that without their Labour they should not eat, they would have spent their whole Week at Lectures,

Lectures, and trusted to be fed by the Ear. I believe few could pretend to have begun with so exorbitant a Zeal, though the Truth is, in the Issue it sometimes arrives to it; and Men that have itching Ears forget the rest of the Body, whilst, to gratify them, they totally neglect all Care of their secular Concerns, and bring themselves and Families to Want and Beggary.

4. Nor is it only this one Rank of Persons whom Idleness has betrayed to Faction; Servants we have frequently seen under the same Seducement, while either having but little Work, or but little Diligence in it, they have found Time to listen after novel Doctrines, with which being once tainted they impatiently thirst after more, and, neglecting the Duties of their Place, spend their Time, which by Compact is their Master's (and can with no more Justice be purloined from him than his Goods) in following factious Teachers, who instruct them so in their Christian Liberty, that they bring them to defy all Subjection; and by telling them they are to call no Man Master upon Earth, that they are to own no King nor Priest but Christ, teach them to condemn all Authority, domestick, civil, or ecclesiastick.

*Servants have neglected their Duty to their Masters, by running after factious Teachers.*

5. If we look farther into Families, we shall find also that many of our She-zealots become so upon the very same Ground, when Women neglect that which St. Paul assigns them as their proper Business, the guiding of the house, their Zeal is at once the Product and Excuse of their Idleness; and in spite of the ill

*Women for this Cause have neglected their Family and Household Affairs.*



Character the wife Man has set on her, *whose feet abide not in her house, Prov. vii. 11.* it becomes the Mark of a Saint, when a Lecture or Conventicle is taken in the Way : And though these feminine Irregularities may seem to be of no great Concern to the Publick, yet Experience convinces the contrary, it having been the unhappy Privilege of that Sex (as ancient as their Mother *Eve*) to be able to do great and important Mischiefs ; and doubtless many Men may give the same Account of their Schism and Sedition, that *Adam* did of his first Sin, *the woman that thou gavest me, &c.* This has always been well understood by Seducers, who have found it the most compendious Way to their Designs, *to lead captive silly women*, and make them the Duck-coys to their whole Family : But even those who have missed of this Influence over the Minds of their Husbands, have yet had it over their Purfes, and out of them supported the Rabbies of the Faction ; who, in Gratitude to those wise *Abigail*s, give their Husbands the Title, and, perhaps, wish them the Fate of *Nabal*. And God knows, how many Men have thus been made Contributors to the Cause they have most detested, maintained that Fire which those Incendiaries have kindled in the holy Place, Money being no less the Sinews of ecclesiastical than secular War.

*The great Neglect  
of catechising  
hath eminently  
contributed to our  
Divisions.*

6. Thus we see how the Idleness, even of the most considerable Persons, has, at the Rebound, been extremely pernicious to the Church, which, like a Clock or Watch, may be disordered by the Rust of the least Pin, how much more then, by that of the main Wheels and Springs ? If Negligence in Lay-callings have, though but an oblique, yet so inauspicious  
an

an Influence, the like Neglect in ecclesiastick must needs have a worse, because more immediate and direct. And would to God we could say this had been wanting to the compleating the Mischief; but, alas, many of those who are called to labour in the Lord's Vineyard, seem to have forgot their Errand, and stand there all the Day idle (a much worse Sight than to have seen them so only in the Market-place;) so that I fear there is too evident Ground of saying, that the slight Execution of the Pastoral-office, has been one of the most eminent Contributors to our Distractions. And among all the Parts of that Charge, none has been more generally, or more perniciously neglected than that of catechising, the Want whereof has left People so unbottomed, that, like a House built on the Sand, every Wind of Doctrine blows down that Faith which they only professed, but understood not. This is that which has made so many unstable Souls, as St. Peter observes, 2 Peter ii. 14. to be the proper Prey of Deceivers. And God knows, we may from sad Experiment confirm the Note. I wish the same Negligence do not again evidence itself by the same Effects. But besides this, which is Part of the publick Ministry, (and deservedly is so, being useful to the whole Church, the Aged as well as Children) there are private Intercourses between Pastor and People, which are of great Use, would God they were of equal Practice. We know a careful Shepherd does not only turn his Flock into a common Pasture, and then think he has done his Work, but does, with a particular Advertence, observe the thriving of every one of them, takes Notice of their single Strayings and Diseases, and accordingly applies himself to reduce or cure them, and surely the like Care is full as necessary in the spiritual Shepherd; it is not the Counsel which is promiscuously

dispensed in a Sermon (and whereof it is odds every Man takes that which is least proper for him) that will do the Business : Converts come not in now, as in St. Peter's Days, in Throngs and Shoals, a more distinct and particular Application is now necessary ; Men must be treated with apart, their particular Wants discerned, and Applications accordingly made of Instructions, Reproof, or Comfort, and it is these appropriate Medicines, that are like to make sound Flocks. Had Ministers generally bestowed more Pains this Way, they might probably have frustrated the Attempts of Seducers, who could not so easily have insinuated themselves into the People, had they found them thus prepossessed : But while these, with all the Arts of a subtle Industry, infuse their Poisons into every one they meet, nothing but the like Diligence in administering Antidotes, is like to countermine them. How much of that has been used I shall leave to the Consciences of concerned Persons to determine. But besides the ill Influence the Pastor's Negligence has on the People, it has, in respect of themselves, an immediate Propriety to the advancing our Debates, the Leisure which is thus acquired, being apt to betray speculative Persons to the Study of those curious Questions, which are the great Disturbers of our Peace, and of those that study them, so few keep themselves in Neutrality, that Parties are still fomented by it ; whereas, were the practical Business of their Charge thoroughly attended, the Remainder of Time would not be more than the Study of the more solid useful Parts of Divinity would exact, and, consequently, there would no Surplus be left for those dangerous Impertinencies, which, as the Apostle says, *serve to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers*, 2 Tim. ii. 14. But when our Watchmen sleep, it is no Marvel if they dream

too,

too, and entertain themselves and others with those fantastick Notions, which the great Day will manifest to have had nothing of Weight and Reality, besides the Mischiefs they wrought.

7. And, indeed, if we scan the Volumes of those vain Speculations, we shall have Cause to conclude that Idleness has created as well as fomented them; and they had as well wanted Authors as Abettors,

*The leisure Hours of our Church-men ill employed in the Study and Writing of Controversies.*

had Men found themselves more useful Business; and that not only the extemporary Chimæras of Fanatics, but the more elaborate Niceties of the Schools, have been thus derived: We know Air possesses no Place, where it first finds not a Vacuity; nor could those lighter Notions have filled Mens Brains, had they found them prepossessed with what was more solid: But when Men wanted more substantial Work for their Understandings, they were fain to employ them thus in making Cob-webs, of which they have made a worse sort of *Jewish* Veil in the Sanctuary, and have now involved the Gospel in greater Obscurities than the Law was before: Whence our *Bezaleels* and *Aholiab*s have been inspired for this Work, I shall not determine, but sure not from him whose Character St. John gives us (in peculiar Reference to Gospel-revelation) that *he is light, and in him is no darkness at all*, 1 John i. 5.

8. Thus we see even Idleness wants not its Operation, but is productive of great and mischievous Effects, it being the unhappy Property of that Vice, that it supplants itself, and by a fatal Antiperistasis makes Men perniciously active; so that we may

*Idleness is oft a Temptation to spend our Time ill,*



truly say, Sloth has made more Business than Industry. I am sure, in this Instance, it has cut out Work for many Ages, though of such a kind, that we have little Reason to wish that our Lord, at his Coming, should find us so doing; yet, for ought now appears, our Activity is so wholly bent that Way, that it is like to be the only, at least the most intense Business we shall be found at.

*and hath been the Original of Faction, and Occasion of much Mischief to the Church.*

9. I might here take a very apt Occasion to declaim against Idleness, as the unhappy Fountain of so great Mischiefs, but that is a Vice that has been so often arraigned, that I need not repeat those Charges which all

Authors, natural, moral, and divine, have laid against it. Let but this, of its being the Original of Faction be added, and there can be nothing wanting to render it a most dangerous Crime, yea, and a most monstrous one too, that operates thus preternaturally, that freezes and yet inflames Men at once, stupifies and enrages: And yet, alas, there is as much Riddle in its Fate as its Nature, it is hated and yet embraced, generally decried, and yet as generally cherished; and though it have no Advocates, has many Friends. Would God Men would at last be ashamed to be what they are, ashamed to own, and by a diligent Attendance on their proper Business, secure themselves first from doing nothing, and then from doing ill, the one being so close an Attendant on the other, that it is scarce possible to sever them. And God knows the Church finds too sad Proof of their Connexion, Idleness having served as Ashes to keep alive that Fire which has set her in Combustion. Thus unhappily passive is she in our Disorders, and accessory to all our Guilt and Punishments; all our peccant Humours concur to her Disease,

Disease, and, like a common Mark, she receives Arrows from all Quarters, we have seen how many Contributors there are to her Ruin, every one whereof, with a wanton Cruelty (like *Cæsar's* Murderers) are ambitious to inflict new Wounds, and to give her supernumerary Deaths; and whilst she is thus surrounded with Assassines, what can we expect, but that her present Languishings should end in Death? that Christian Religion now crumbled into so many minute Fractions, should, like Dust, be scattered, and irrecoverably dissipated? and thus infallibly it must be, if either God do not miraculously countermine us, and do more for us than we can do against ourselves, or we recover so much Sobriety as to forbear to massacre what we pretend to love, and endeavour to bind up those Wounds at which our own Souls are like to expire.

## C H A P. XIX.

*The Conclusion, drawn from all the Premises.*

I: **W**E have hitherto examined the Effects and Originals of our Contentions, and now the only remaining Enquiry is concerning the Ways of Redress. And that will exact no long Disquisition. For, as in Diseases, it is said, the knowing the Cause is one Half of the Cure, so more especially is it here, where the Remedies are merely privative, and we are not to be healed by external Applications, but only by subtracting those Humours which feed the Malady: There will therefore need no other Prescription than to advise the

*The best and speediest Way for the healing our Distractions is to remove the Occasions thereof.*

exterminating

exterminating of all those Passions and Interests which have appeared accessary to our Quarrels, which, though they are become the publick epidemick Disease, yet, as the Infection did, so must the Cure arise from single Persons: For as we look not a common Pestilence should cease, without due Care and Manage both of the Sick and Sound; so neither can this Church-plague ever abate, but by the Cure, or fortifying its individual Members.

2. Let every Man, therefore, *Every Man ought, who has any way made himself in this Case, to a Party to these Contests, seriously interrogate his own Heart, examine and suspect himself guilty What it is that has engaged rather than another. him in them? If any of the sinister Motives before rehearsed,*

*let him, for a while, shift the Scene, and instead of accusing others as Opposites to Truth, condemn himself as an Enemy to Peace; remembering, that how just or important soever the Cause be, it is not so to him, whilst he serves his Humours and Designs under its Covert. The Philosophers, in their darker Notions of Truth, could yet discern, that she was not accessible to any who sought her not purely for herself, with sincere and single Intentions, and if she entertain no Pupils, that are not so qualified, is it fit she should have Guardians and Champions of a quite distant Temper? No, he that undertakes the Defence of speculative Verity, must first possess himself of that practick Truth the Psalmist speaks of, Psalm li. that in the inward parts, such a Simplicity and Integrity of Purpose, as may supplant all those indirect Aims, purge out every Prejudice and Passion which may bias and pervert him; and by that time he has done this, it is odds but he will find a new Face of Affairs, and discern that many of those Things he so fiercely contended*

tended about, were either false or trivial ; acquired their Considerableness only from those magnifying Perspectives of his own Lusts, through which he viewed them. However, till he have thus denudated himself of all these Incumbrances, he is utterly unqualified for these *Agones* ; and how lawfully soever others may strive, it is sure he cannot, that does it upon so unlawful Grounds, and therefore, upon pain of losing much more than a corruptible Crown, must withdraw himself. As for those who can yet acquit themselves from having fomented our Distractions, I shall not forbid them to look with great Complacency upon it, but rather by considering how valuable a Piece of Innocency it is, engage and encourage themselves to preserve it, and to that Purpose, jealously to examine the first Overtures of a Temptation. When they find any Proneness to immerse in Faction, any unwonted Heat towards a Dissenter, to trace it to its Fountain and Original, nicely to observe whether it issue not from some of those envenomed Springs forementioned, and make as much Hastē to stop its Current, as they would to impede the most overwhelming Inundation, for such it will infallibly prove to those who indulge to its Course - But as a Turf will at first close the Breach, which, neglected, becomes the Inlet of a mighty Torrent, so had this early Vigilance been used, it might, with Ease, have prevented those Distempers in private Breasts, from whence the general Confusion has sprung. As it is, might but these two Things be obtained, would but the Guilty purge, and the Innocent guard themselves, we might yet hope to see an End of our Discords ; not that I suppose it possible to extinguish all Diversity of Opinions among Men, who, from their differing Faculties, and other guiltless Occurrents, may and will have their Judgments



ments severally disposed. But, first, were all, who have upon the former culpable Motives entered the Lists, excluded, we should find they would amount to such a Number, that there would be few left to maintain the Combat. Nay, secondly, were it not for those concealed Inducements, there would scarce be any Combat to maintain, those are the Things that convey the Sting and Malignity into our Differences, without those we might dissent, but not fall out, and should no more be angry to see another opine contrary to us, than we are to see him of a different Stature, or Complexion. In fine, let us pretend what we will, it is the Carnality within, that raises all the Combustions without; this is the great Wheel to which the Clock owes its Motion, while the Pretext of Truth and Piety is but like the Hand, set indeed more conspicuously, but directed wholly by the secret Movings of the other. This, this alone is it which creates and continues our Broils, and by a monstrous Conjunction of Properties, is itself both Flame and Fuel: Nor can we doubt, that from hence spring those railing Accusations, we bring one against another, if we remember what St. Jude tells us, that the Angel brought them not even against the Devil himself, he could calmly manage a Dispute with the most execrable and provoking Adversary, because his angelick Nature had none of that carnal Leaven which ferments to the souring of ours, an evident Indication what it is that has rendered our Arguings so invective, that Divinity seems now an Artifice to elude Law by daily patronizing those Libels, which would else be obnoxious to civil Justice.

3. But I presume there need  
*Men generally* no more be said to evince this,  
*cherish their Vices* which has, I fear, the Attestation  
*under the Covert* of too many Consciences,  
*of Religion.* to

to be generally doubted ; the greater Difficulty will be, to persuade the depositing of those Lusts, which, though they are confessedly the *Boutefeaus* among us, have yet, by I know not what Fascination, so endeared themselves, that we tenaciously retain them in spite of all their appendent Mischiefs ; nay, we cherish and foster them, and for that very Purpose bring them under the Covert of Religion. He that has but a puny Vice, if he get it, like *Joash*, concealed and sheltered in the Sanctuary, it will not only live, but reign too, put on a Port and Majesty, and appear venerable upon the Pretence of that Piety, whose Essence and Being it evacuates and undermines.

4. Indeed Sin never arrives at so luxuriant a Growth as when it roots in hallowed Ground, which Satan so well knows, that he has ever been industrious to plant it in that Soil. Thus we find he had introduced the most brutish Crimes into the Religion of the *Gentiles*, interwoven them into their sacred Rites and Mysteries, till Virtue and Vice had changed Names, and it became Piety to be wicked, and Profaneness to be innocent. And when that gross Deceit became detected by Gospel-light, when he could not, in the same Manner, obtrude upon Christians, he yet found the Way to do it more obliquely, and by starting these religious Quarrels, gave at once Employment and Reputation to the most irreligious Vices. For, alas, what Part of wild Fury was there in the Heathen Bacchanals, which we have not seen equalled, if not exceeded by some intoxicated Zealots ? Or what Cruelty in their most barbarous Rites, which has not been matched by the Inhumanity of dissenting Christians ? So that, upon a just scanning, all our splendid

*Religion is sometimes made to countenance the foulest Crimes.*

did Pretence of Sanctity is but an Emulation of Gentile Impurity under a better Name ; and while we damn Heathens for their moral Virtues, we are yet so stupid as to hope ourselves to be saved by their worst Vices.

*The great End of Christianity perverted by those that contend about the purest Profession of it.*

5. And now who that does enough consider, can think he can enough bewail this sad State of Affairs ? that Christianity should thus out-run itself, and bring us round to Gentilism again, whilst her Professors ridiculously contend for the Title

of the best Christians, by such Acts as denominate them none at all. Thus have we inverted the Significancy of that sacred Name, and made it serve only to upbraid the Contrariety of our Practice ; so that that which was once the Index to point out all moral and divine Virtues, does now, on the contrary, mark out that Part of the World where least of them reside. This, this alone is the Prize we have acquired with so much Sweat and Blood, this the Triumph we have brought to our Religion, which, indeed, could never have sunk to such a Despicableness by any Endeavours but our own ; for so long as Christianity waged War only with foreign Enemies, she never missed to be victorious, but since that these intestine Discords have turned her Force against herself, *Bella geri placuit nullos habitura triumphos*, there is no Possibility of Success, the mere Fight implies a Defeat, and the Swords of all Parties meet in her Bowels. It was a passionate Exposition that *Julia* is said to have used with her two Sons, *Antonine* and *Geta*, whose Animosities having prompted them to divide the Empire, which they were jointly to have enjoyed, she asked them whether they would divide their Mother also ; implying

plying how much their Discords had racked and torn her. And sure our common Mother may make a yet sadder Complaint of her Sons, by whose unkind Dissensions she is so miserably mangled, that she may cry out with the Psalmist, *My soul is among lions, and I lie among the Children of men that are set on fire.*

6. And now, if amidst all our importunate Pretences to Piety, there be indeed any such thing among us, methinks it should give us some Relentings, make us sadly consider to what a deplorable

*We ought to bewail the Multitude of our Distractions, and the Hand we have had therein,*

Condition we have brought that very Religion on which we profess to hang all our Hopes; and would God those who are the most nearly concerned in this Contemplation, would pursue it to the utmost; let them, on the one hand, set the most glittering Temptations to Discord, and, on the other, let them view the dismal Effects of it, and then consider at how dear a Rate they gratify a few impotent Passions. Can any Man, without Horror, think, that his Thirst of Glory has brought Dishonour to his Religion, and, consequently, to his God; that his curious Enquiries into Things secret, has helped to evacuate the more useful Things revealed, or, in short, that his Pursuit of his various Interests and Appetites has destroyed what was so incomparably more valuable, the Honour of the Gospel, the Unity of the Church, and as many Souls as have perished by that Scandal? It was as infamous a Character of Inhumanity as the very Poets could feign of *Diomedes*, that he fed his Horses with Man's Flesh; but, alas, that Barbarity is here infinitely outdone, when Men nourish far worse Brutes, their own unreasonable Lusts, with those Things that



are most sacred. Certainly, were the Vastness of this Guilt thoroughly weighed, it would make Men sick of those petty wretched Acquits they have thus purchased, make them fling back this Price of Blood, I say not with the same Despair, but with as great Remorse and Detestation as *Judas* did the Silver Pieces for which he sold his Master. It is sure the Crimes have too great an Affinity, as in all other Circumstances, so especially in this, that as the one was, so the other is most frequently the Guilt of an Apostle, I mean of those to whom Christ has committed the dispensing of that Gospel which they thus evacuate : And, doubtless, this is a Consideration of great Enhancement, as that which superadds Treachery to all the other pestilent Ingredients of the Crime ; it is the falsifying the most important Trust ; for under Words of that Signification we find the Office of the Ministry everywhere represented in Scripture, as Stewards, Ambassadors, Shepherds, and, consequently, the Accounts of the Sin must swell so much the higher. For a Steward to embezzle those Goods he undertakes to manage ; an Ambassador to betray his Prince for whom he should negotiate ; a Shepherd to worry that Flock which he is set to guard, these are Crimes that double their Malignity from the Quality of the Actors ; and yet this is undeniably the Guilt of all those whose Profession having devoted them to the Church, have impiously changed the Scene, and devoted the Church to them, served all their mean degenerate Ends upon her ; and as Chirurgeons are said sometimes to deal with profitable Patients, kept open, nay, widened her Wounds for their own Advantages.

7. It has been the Priests Litaney, as ancient as *Joel's* Time, *and not prostitute* *the Peace and* Spare thy people, O Lord, and give

give not thine heritage to reproach; but now, alas, who shall prevail with them to do that themselves which they beg of God, to spare his People and his Heritage; to prostitute them no more to their own sinister Designs, nor by their vain and endless Contentions, expose them as well to Ruin as Contempt. He were indeed a happy Orator that could in this effectually intercede with them, though one would think the Wonder should lie on the other Side, and the only strange thing be, that they should either need or resist such a Solicitation, it being so much the Concern of all that ought, as well upon the Score of Advantage as Duty, to be dear to them; so that the Church may most aptly address to these her Sons, in the same Form St. Paul does to the *Philippians*, when he conjures them to Unity, *Phil. ii. 1. If therefore there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil you my joy that ye be like minded.* And can it be possible for any who have tasted all or any of these, to think fit to wrangle them away? to exchange these divine Irradiations, the Antepast and Emblem of Heaven, for those bitter Dissensions, whose *Alpha* and *Omega*, their Original and End, are Hell, and do as lively represent as they certainly lead to the Horror and Confusion of that Land of Darkness?

8. But if some Mens Appetites be so depraved, that they find more Melody in Discord, than in the Harmony of the angelick Choirs, yet even these can discern Musick in a Consort of Plaudites, and seldom miss to be affected with those Eulogies which are given

*To study the Peace of the Church is highly commendable and praiseworthy.*

themselves ; and therefore, though they disjoin the Apostle's Motives, *Phil. iv. 8.* and will do nothing for Virtue, yet they may be presumed more considerate of Praise ; and God knows, in a wrong Sense, they are too much so : And sure, as we have already observed, by it have made no small Contributions to our Discords, yet did they measure Glory by its right and proper Standard, they would find they have all this while courted a Shadow, and that the Substance will never be acquired by being Fomenters of publick Mischief ; but the Unhappiness of it is, that our ecclesiastick as our secular Duellists, abuse themselves with false Notions of Honour, novel Opinions and subtil Questions they think attest the Pregnancy and Acuteness of their Understandings, and give them Reputation ; but, alas, how vain an Imagination is this ? Who admires the Sagacity of the Viper, that eats her Way through her Mother's Bowels ? Or who reverences a Man for the Sharpness of that Sword wherewith he commits his Parricide ? Nay, what more infamous Brands have Records of all Ages stuck upon any, than those who were *ingeniosissime nequam, & facundi malo publico*, who used the best Parts to the worst Ends, and with the greatest Cunning and Artifice have contrived their Mischiefs ?

*Small Credit for  
any Man to em-  
ploy his Wit or  
Parts to the Pre-  
judice of the  
Church.*

9. But could we abstract from these pernicious Effects, and suppose that this Exercise of their Faculties were innocent, yet sure it would be too light and impertinent to become Matter of Praise. He that should spend all his Time in tying inextricable Knots, only to baffle the Industry of those that should attempt to unloose them, would sure be thought not much to have served his Generation.

ration. It is one of the certainest Estimates we can make of a Man, to measure him by the Employments he chooseth, if those be slight and trifling, they suggest the Person to have low Thoughts: What an Abasement of Majesty was it thought in *Nero* to become a Fiddler and Stage-player? And *Herodian* tells us, that Men hoped no longer for any thing princely from *Commodus* the Emperor, when he had once listed himself among the Fencers, and, instead of the magnificent Stiles of his Predecessors, derived from the Conquests of great and populous Nations, assumed this, *The Vanquisher of a thousand Gladiators*: And certainly it is no less a Descent and Diminution for those who were designed by God for the highest Achievements, the subduing the Kingdom of Satan, and pulling down his strong Holds, to devote themselves to these so much ignobler Contests, and account their Conquests, not from the Number of Souls won to God, but of Opposers worsted in Argument. Indeed, as we before observed, they have now rendered the Church a kind of Theatre, Disputes are managed with such Slight and Sophistry, that, at the best, the Litigants do but set forth a Shew of Fencers; it were well if they did not sometimes play the Gladiators, by that wounding deadly Sharpness they use. And it would be considered what a Change is now made: In the primitive Times, none that owned any Relation to the Church were allowed to be Spectators of those Games, now that is made the Stage, and her ablest Persons the Actors. But, certainly, it is very little to the Reputation of those who have so unworthily debauched both it and themselves; and, therefore, to all other Dissuatives, we may add this of the Uncreditableness: For let Men fancy what they please, of the Glory acquired in these Opportunities of shewing their Parts, the best that can be said of them



is, that *they use Wit foolishly*; a Character whereof the one Part devours the other, and leaves not so much as a Mouthful of that popular Air which these Chamæleons gasp after. In a word, though Vain-glory be a Principle I shall commend to no Man, yet, in this Case, it were more tolerable if it would work the right Way, put them upon what were really praise-worthy, and then, sure, it would incline them rather to close than widen the Breaches of *Sion*. To inflict Wounds on an unresisting Patient, is a Thing that requires neither Courage nor Skill; every Man can do that who has but Ill-nature enough; but to cure them is an Act at once of Art and Mercy, and intitles to the Praise of both: And therefore, if any Man's Eagerness of Glory have made him over-see the Way to it, let him now, at last, recover his Wanderings, and seek it in this one only proper Method.

*We ought rather  
to repair those  
Breaches which  
we have helped to  
make,*

10. But this is, I confess, a Topick of Persuasion fitter for Philosophers than Divines, and I wish I may have urged it impertinently; it being much less Shame for me to have done so, than for them to need such an

Argument. There is another more genuine and proper, derived from the Nature of distributive Justice, which requires a Man to do his utmost to repair the Injuries he has done to any; this is so stated a Rule, that all our Casuists justly press it in all Cases of Damage: But are there not many of them, who, while they so eagerly assert that Obligation in other Mens Cases, do as *David* did in the Matter of the poor Man's Lamb, severely sentence that Injustice whereof themselves are more highly guilty? To every such I would speak in the Words of *Nathan*, and say, *Thou art the man*. Alas, shall every  
little

little Trifle I purloin from my Neighbour have Weight enough to sink me to the Abyss? and shall Thefts of the greatest Magnitude, the robbing God of his Honour, the Church not only of her Patrimony, but her Peace; and the World of those inestimable Benefits, which, from an uniform consonant Christianity, were to have been transmitted to it; shall these, I say, be so slight and inconsiderable, as not to hinder his Ascent to the Hill of the Lord? Shall the least Violence I offer to the Person of an Enemy, oblige me to Satisfaction, and shall he rend and tear the Body of his Saviour (who willingly exposed his natural Body, only in Tenderneſs to that mystical one which is thus violated) and shall this criminous Barbarity exact no Offers towards Amends? Certainly no Man can have Partiality enough to think it, and if he do not, he is to remember himself indispensibly engaged to take the same Course he prescribes to others, and with his utmost Industry endeavour to repair the Injury he has done.

II. And O that we might see this so essential a Piece of Justice assumed among us, that our impertinent Strifes might be superseded, and all moulded into the one noble Emulation, who shall fastest unravel his own Mischiefs, and promote that Peace he has hitherto disturbed. This, indeed, were worthy to be the united Design of all learned Men; and were it once so, who knows how prosperous it might be: For though some single Attempts have miscarried, yet probably one great Cause why they do so, was because they were single. When one Person comes with pacifick Arguments to part an enraged Multitude, let his Reasons be never so convincing, they are not like to be much adverted.

*and all of us to concur and join therein as one Man.*

adverted to ; the only Effect is, that he who designed himself the common Friend, is taken as the common Enemy ; but where many associate in such a Design, and make a Party for Peace, their Numbers give a Considerableness to their Proposal, and prepare for their Success. And were there such a Combination in order to the Church's Quiet, it were more than possible they might undermine the contrary Attempts of Faction and Discord.

*The several dissenting Parties among us ought to unite in those Things wherein they all agree,*

12. And why should not every Man be ambitious to make one in this so pious a Confederacy, and resolve most studiously to endeavour the composing the Distractions of the Church, in which they may borrow something of Instruction even from their past Guilts, and copy out their own Industry to this better Purpose. This is sure, our Disputes had never so multiplied, had there not been a great deal of unhappy Diligence in nourishing the Seeds of them : Every controverted Tenet has been heightened and improved, till it have spawned a numerous Brood, so that those who at first differed, perhaps, but in some few Things, wrangle on till at last they agree in fewer : Now, were the like Industry applied the other Way, it might sure do much to the changing the whole Scene. If Men would as nicely observe the Principles of Agreement between dissenting Parties, and with as much Art and Care seek to dilate and spread them ; why might not they as much overwhelm our Differences, as they have been overwhelmed by them ? It is sure that those universal Truths, to which all Parties assent, are, as the clearest for their Evidence, so the most important for their Consequence : And why should not these, if rightly managed, be a more enforcing

forcing Motive to Unity, than the more singular Opinions (perhaps Fancies) of some Men, can be to Discord? Certainly would but our *Moseses* try what this Rod of God in their Hand could do, they would find it able to devour all those of the Magicians. Would they, like *Benhadad's* Ambassadors, catch hold of every amicable Expression, any thing that looks towards Peace, and close in with it, they might probably see Effects beyond what can at a Distance be expected. For, sure, Peace is not such a dry Tree, such a sapless unfertile thing, but that it might fructify and increase as well as Discord, were there a just Care taken to cherish and nourish it.

13. Indeed this Design is the only Amulet which can render it safe to look into Controversies, which are else apt to infuse a kind of Acrimony and Venom into Mens Spirits; for we see many, whose Curiosity at first brought them as unconcerned Spectators, do within a while engage with all Earnestness in the Contest: But those who study Differences only with an Aim of composing them, these have their Thoughts determined and fixed, and so not left loose to the Enticement of any Party. *Aristotle* says, that on the Hill *Olympus* the Air is so subtile and piercing, that those who ascend thither, are forced to carry with them wet Sponges, by that Moisture somewhat to assuage that extreme Tenuity which otherwise would be deadly; and sure they that deal in Controversies, live in no less corrosive an Air, and therefore had need make the like Provision, and carry with them this pacifick Purpose, as a Lenitive and Emollient against the infectious Sharpness they will there meet with.

*and study our Differences with a Mind inclined rather to compose than widen them.*

14. And



*The Victory over  
our Passions is pre-  
ferable to all o-  
ther Conquests.*

14. And now, how blessed a thing were it, if we could once thus follow the Things that make for Peace? That the numberless mutual Enmities which are now among us, may all be reduced into one, that we may fight not against single Adversaries, but against War itself, and contend against nothing but Contention. And sure our Victory here were worthy Millions of those petty Conquests wherewith Men please themselves, and which acquire them so little of real Advantage, that the same Account which was given of *Otho* and *Vitellius*, that the War would swallow up the one, and the Victory the other, is too applicable to our Combatants, who are like to be equally unhappy in Defeat or Success. The *Spartans* had an Order that when any of their Generals had compassed his Design by Policy or Treaty, he should sacrifice an Ox, but when by Force and Blood-shed, a Cock only: From the distant Values of which Oblations *Plutarch* observes how much they preferred the Achievements of calm and sober Counsels, before those of Strength and Power: But sure the Disparity is more eminent in the present Instance, where, if we fight we wound our Brethren, but, if we unite, we destroy our Enemy, baffle and circumvent Satan's Master-stratagem, and not only worst but outwit him. Indeed, this, and this only, is worth our Industry, whereas those little Defeats we give each other, are like those in a civil War, wherein the Publick is still sure to be a Loser; upon which Consideration the *Romans* allowed not their Captains to triumph for such Victories; and sure our Christianity is very ill bestowed on us, if it have made us so much worse natured as to choose those ruinous Conquests

Conquests at home, before the most glorious and profitable ones abroad.

15. It was *Abner's* Admonition to *Joab*, when he was in a hot Pursuit of the *Israelites*, 2 Sam. ii. 26. *Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?* And sure it is more than Time for our Leaders to make the same Reflexion, and as *Joab* did there, call back the People from following their Brethren; Nay, indeed, would they but attend, they might hear themselves called back, the great Captain of their Salvation sounding a Retreat from these fatal Skirmishes. *Xenophon*, in the Institution of *Cyrus*, tells us of one *Chrysanthus*, who, in the Heat of Battle, had his Hand lift up to strike an Enemy, but hearing, in the very Instant, the Trumpet sound a Retreat, stopped his Blow; a great Sobriety of Courage so to shew more Zeal to the obeying his General, than the annoying his Enemy; and an Instance of much Reproach to our spiritual Combatants, who have shewed themselves so much worse disciplined, as in spite of daily repeated Calls to Peace, still to pursue their Hostility: But sure such an Insolence is so inconsistent with the Pretence they make of fighting God's Battles, that they must either reform the one, or disclaim the other.

16. And now, if after all that hath or can be said of the Obligation, Necessity, or Advantages of Peace, we are put to the Psalmist's Complaint, *that there are still those that will make them ready to battle: If Men are of so untreatable a Temper, that nothing can be obtained* *and to bewail the Mischiefs which they cannot redress;*  
of

of them, what remains for those that are peaceable and faithful in *Israel*, but to bewail those Mischiefs they cannot redress? If the Church must perish, at least to give her Funeral-rites, and if they cannot quench her Flames, yet to bedew her Ashes with their Tears. It is true, we cannot yet say she is quite dead; but though she breathes yet in a few pious peaceful Souls, yet, like a palsied Person, she scarce moves a Limb, she wants Vigour to actuate the Generality of her Professors, and remains rather a Trunk than a Body: And sure, if there be Truth in that physical Aphorism, which says, that *Diseases which cross the Temper and Constitution of the Patient are most dangerous*, we may well conclude her desperate, there being nothing more repugnant to the very Elements and Principles of her Being, than those Contentions under which she now groans.

*and implore the  
Aid of our spiri-  
tual Physician for  
the Curing of our  
Distempers.*

17. Yet there is an omnipotent Power to whom no Difficulties are insuperable, an unerring Physician, who makes the most hopeless Diseases but the Triumph of his Art. O let us resort to him, and invite his

Aids in the same pathetick Form, wherewith he was solicited for *Lazarus*, *John xi. 3.* Lord, *behold she whom thou lovest is sick*: She for whose sake thou enduredst such Contradiction of Sinners against thyself, is now, by the Contradiction of her own Children, languishing and expiring, she for whom thou pouredst out thy Blood, lies weltering in her own, Lord, save, or she perisheth: Were such Petitions enforced and ingeminated by the daily Breathings of humble devout Hearts, who knows how prevalent they might be? In this Sense also Heaven might suffer Violence; nor is there any better Countermine to all the Outrages acted upon Earth, than by making

making them thus reverberate in our Cries and Prayers.

18. And perhaps this Consideration will draw us all, even the most peaceful of us, into the Guilt of a negative Accessoriness to the present Mischiefs. There are divers that dislike our Contentions, and blame the Abettors; but yet with such Unconcernedness and Indifference, as that wherewith we commonly talk of the Combustions of foreign States, wherein we rather express our Judgment than our Resentments, and do make it more our Discourse than our Concern. And even of those who have, in some Degree, laid it to heart, who is there that has not been some way wanting in the Ardency or Frequency of his Intercessions? Let every one seriously interrogate his own Heart, and I fear it will witness to him, that his own private Concerns are much apter to excite his Devotions. Let us remember with what Passion and Importunity we invoke God in our particular Exigents, and consider whether we are equally affected with those of the Church: Hast thou been, like *Hezekiah*, sick unto Death? And hast thou with him wept sore, and vehemently solicited a Recovery? Has thy Estate been invaded by Oppression, thy Fame by Slander and Detraction? And hast thou with loud and earnest Cries, appealed to that *God to whom vengeance belongs*? Or hast thou been in that Condition which is proverbial for setting Men to their Prayers? Hast thou, like *Jonas*, been in a Storm, in minutely Expectation of being swallowed up by the Waves, if not the Whale; and in this Extacy of Fear, when as *thy soul was*, as the Psalmist speaks, *even melted away because of the troubles*, hast cried

*Few lay to heart  
the Distractions  
of the Church, or  
intercede to God  
on her Behalf.*



unto the Lord, and even out-noised the Billows in thy clamorous Importunities for Aid? Hast thou, in all, or any of these Estates, been thus affected for thyself? Then remember whether thy Resentments have been proportionable for that which is much better than thyself. If the no less imminent and pressing Dangers of the Church, have not as much awakened thy Fervor, given as sharp and piercing an Accent to thy Prayers, thou must needs confess, thou hast fallen short of what thou shouldest and mightest have done towards her Rescue.

*We ought to cry mightily to God, and deprecate those Judgments that are upon us;* 19. And if this Inquisition be impartially made, who among us can plead *Not guilty*? And therefore, in Reflexions upon our past Omissions, we are in Justice obliged to redouble our Zeal, to say over again our tepid heartless Prayers, and inflame them with a Coal from the Altar; an earnest affectionate Concern for all that is holy, such as may prompt us to cry, and that mightily to God: We see the *Ninevites* could do it when there was no visible Approach of Danger, but merely upon the Presage of a stranger Prophet, backed with the Consciousness of their own Guilt; I fear we more than equal them in the latter Motive, I am sure we far exceed them as to the former. The Miseries we are to deprecate being not only under Denunciation and Threat, but actually upon us, though withal so improveable, that after all the black Catalogue our Experience brings in, our Fears meet us with the *bottomless propheticke menace*, *Isaiah v. 25. For all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* It is the usual Oeconomy of divine Justice to make our Crimes our Punishment, and to give us up to those Ills which were at first, our own depraved Choice:  
And

And God knows we have too much Reason to fear this may be our Case; that we who have so perversely violated all the Bands of Unity, wantonly wrangled ourselves out of all Inclinations to Peace, should never be able to resume them; that all those gentle Breathings of Grace by which exasperated Passions are to be cooled and tempered, should be withdrawn, and we finally be given up to be dissipated by those Whirlwinds ourselves have raised; that Christianity which we have made the Stale and Property to our irregular Appetites, used only as Fig-leaves to hide our Shame, should wither and shrink into nothing, and that we, who could not agree in what Manner to retain it, should at last too well agree to renounce it.

20. This, alas, as it is the fearfullest, so is it the probablest: *and beseech the Issue of our wild Contentions, Divine Goodness, such as nothing but the miraculous Effluxes of Divine Clemency can avert. O let us, with Unwillingness to be healed, all the Groans and Tears so deplored a Condition excites, address thither, importune the Father of mercies to pity us, who know not how to pity ourselves, and that though we have cast off all Bowels, yet that we may find them all centred in him; that he will heal our Wounds, and which of all other is the most desperate, our Unwillingness to be healed; that the Spirit of Peace may overshadow us, and impress on us the Dove-like Qualities of Meekness and Gentleness; that he would rescue our Religion from our Profanation, not by taking it from us, but by conforming us to it: Finally that he would do for us, not only above what we can ask or think, but beyond what we would wish or choose, and not suffer us to acquire the Miseries we so eagerly pursue.*

*We should qualify ourselves for this Intercession by universal Holiness and Purity of Life.*

21. This Divine Interposition alone is it that can possibly secure us, and indeed the Suit amounts to no less, than that he will force upon us the Blessings we resist, and do us good against our Wills, which is so bold a Request, that they had need be more than ordinary Favourites that shall prefer it. Those Hands must be very pure that are lift up in such an Intercession; and therefore all that undertake it are obliged to qualify themselves for it, by purging out not only the Leaven of Malice and Strife, but all other Filthiness of the Flesh and Spirit; without this, we can never approve ourselves to intercede in earnest; for what can be more ridiculous than to deprecate the Ruin of Christianity by the Contentions of other Men, when ourselves contrive it by some other Vice of our own? This is not to desire it should live, but that none but we should kill it. It will therefore concern those who wish the Peace of the Church, to examine whether they do as much project for her Purity, otherwise it is a Mockery to pretend such a jealous Tenderness for her. We have seen there are more Ways than one, by which Christian Practice may be evacuated, and it matters little from whence that Wind blows that shipwrecks our Piety; yet it is not to be denied, that of all those tempestuous Blasts, this of our Contentions is the roughest and most fatal. It is indeed not a single Gust, but an-Encounter and struggling of several contrary Winds, and God knows no poetical Description can outdo the Horror of the Storms they have raised; yet, for ought I discern, there is nothing that is less vulgarly accused, which I must account to the Reader, as the Cause why I have detained

detained him so long upon this Head; and given it a Length so unproportionable to the preceeding Parts of this Discourse,

## C H A P. XX.

*The C L O S E.*

**I** **W**E have now seen the unhappy Riddle of the Unchristianness of Christians unfolded, have observed the Originals and Causes of that which is too notorious to all the World in its Effects. And though, in this cursory View, the Reader is not to think he has any such complete Discovery, as should supersede his own farther Inquisition; yet as it may serve to awaken, so somewhat to assist his Industry, give him some Light and Insight into the Wiles of Satan: And by branding some of the chief of those Cheats which have robbed us of our Piety, prepare for the Detection of the whole Confederacy: In the Interim, this Specimen may serve to stop his Wonder at the ruinous Estate of Christianity; for though it is true, that it was compacted of all the most incorruptible Materials, had all the Harmony of Parts which the most exact Frame and Composure could give it, and so was qualified, both for Strength and Beauty, to have defied all the Injuries of Time; yet, while she has so many Underminers; it is not strange to see her in the Dust, there being no one of these, especially that I last insisted on, which has not destructive Efficacy enough, first to deface, and then to ruin her.



2. But it is but an unprofitable Acquest to know the Authors of our Mischiefs, if we stop there, this Enquiry being Matter not of mere Curiosity, but of the nearest and most pressing Interest: We search not after Malefactors for their Acquaintance, but for their Punishment, and our own Security; and all our Discoveries of this kind are vain, if we apply them not to that Purpose. Let me therefore conclude with this earnest Petition to the Reader, That he will not, to all the native Defects of this Discourse, add this accidental one, that it shall be perfectly impertinent, a mere Waste of his Time and my own; which it will inevitably prove, if it engage him not in an earnest Prosecution of those Delinquents it hath impeached, and in as earnest an Endeavour to repair the Mischiefs they have wrought.

3. In short, let every Man deposite what he has here read, not with his Memory only, but his Conscience, let him there seriously ponder the Excellency of that *holy vocation*, as *St. Paul* terms it, *Eph. iv. 1. to which he is called*; and then as seriously consider, *whether he have*, as the Apostle there exhorts, *walked worthy of it*; if he find he have not (as, alas, who is there that has?) let him search out, as the Particulars, so the Causes of his Miscarriages; diligently sift out those Fallacies of Satan, or his own Heart; those sly Delusions which have made him act thus preposterously against all the Convictions of common Reason, natural Conscience, or Christian Experience; and when he has discovered, let him make no Delay to rescue himself from their Treacheries, but manfully break those Withs and Cords (which are too weak to hold any that will, but in earnest, remember he is a *Nazarite*, a Person consecrate to God) resolutely resist the insidious Careses of those *Delilahs*, which will deliver not himself

himself only, but the Ark, to the *Philistines*. Nor is he to content himself with his own single Escape, but to propagate the Deliverance to as many as he can ; let him blazon and stigmatize those Impostors (for it is a combining with them to conceal them) warn and caution others against those juggling Artifices, by which himself was entrapped, and make his own Shipwrecks a Sea-mark for the securing the Course of other Passengers. This is the Effect of Christ's Admonition to St. Peter, *When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren* ; and a Piece of that fraternal Charity we all owe to every particular Soul, to whom we have Opportunity to dispense it.

4. But, besides that private Obligation, it becomes a Duty upon a higher and more publick Account, it being the only Way to take off that Scandal we have brought upon our Religion ; which, as it was not contracted by the Irregularities of one or two Persons, but by associated and common Crimes, so neither will it be removed by a few single, and private Reformations ; there must be Combinations, and publick Confederacies in Virtue, to balance and counterpoise those of Vice, or she will never recover that pristine Honour which she acquired by the general Piety of her Professors. In those primitive Days there was such an Abhorrence of all that was ill, that a vicious Person was looked on as a kind of Monster or Prodigy, and like a putrified Member cut off, as being not only dangerous, but noisome to the Body : But, alas, the Scene is so changed, that the Church is now made up of such as she would then have cast out ; and it is now as remarkable an Occurrent to find a good Christian, as it was there to see a bad : And since every thing is estimated, not according to its rare and casual, but frequent usual Operations, it is easy to conclude, that Christianity

Christianity has lost as much in its Repute, as it appears to have done in its Efficacy; nor will there be any way of repairing it, till we be generally rendered so malleable to its Impressions, that our Lives may attest its Force and Energy.

5. Nay, indeed, it is not only its Honour, but its Being is concerned in it; active Principles cease to be when they cease to act. You cannot hinder the Fire to burn but by putting it out: And to suppress the Operation of our Religion is indeed to extinguish it; at least, to deprive it of its proper and specifick Act: So that if it can be said to be, it is only by that Abuse of Speech which calls a dead or painted Man, a Man: It may perhaps be a Vizor for the Hypocrite, a Stale for the Ambitious, a Wash or Tincture for the Covetous; but where it is these, it ceases to be itself. The Essence and Being of Christianity is Practice; and according to that Test and Proof thereof, where almost can it be said to exist in the World? We have, indeed, some Images and Shadows of it; some have taken its Picture, but the Substance and solid Body is vanished, resolved into Air, and seems sadly to have moralized the poetick Fable of *Sihyll's* being worn into a Voice, *we have turned it into a mere Noise and Sound*, nay, which is worse, into an Echo, that flattering complying Voice, which reverberates every Man's own Language to him: Men dictate to their Religion, and then will needs persuade themselves and others, that their Religion dictates to them, will have the Rebounds of their own Fancy or Lust pass for Divine Oracles; so suborning this airy fantastick Christianity to legitimate those Practices which the real solid one forbids and execrates.

6. To this dismal forlorn Estate have we brought that which was designed to bring us to Bliss; here-in far exceeding the Barbarity of the brutish *Sodomytes*,

mites, they would have violated the Messengers of their Ruin, but we those of our Safety ; we having not only neglected, but vilified and reproached the Embassy sent us from Heaven, and instead of embracing that Purity and Peace it recommended to us, have done our Parts to make it forgotten, that ever it was sent upon any such Errand ; and indeed so it is like to be, if some heroick Piety do not revive its Memory, and teach us to record it not so much in our Books as Lives : There, and there only it will be universally legible ; there it would indeed appear, what it is in its own Nature, *the power of God unto salvation.*

7. And now why should we not all emulously contend, who shall first put off that ugly Vizor we have put upon our Religion, and restore it to its native Form ? especially considering, that with its Beauty we lose its Dowry too, forfeit all those glorious Rewards which it promises to them that preserve it immaculate. It is only a pure and undefiled Religion that will invest us in those white Robes, wherein we are to follow the Lamb. And sure those who have here endeavoured to darken and extinguish all the Rays of spiritual Light, that have lived as if they professed Christianity merely in spite, to defame it, must never hope it shall bring them to *shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*, or procure them the Reward of blameless Souls. No, it promises no other Crown than that of Righteousness, and therefore they that want the Righteousness, must want the Crown also ; nay, besides that so inestimable a Reversion, they lose all those present Joys and Satisfactions which true Christian Practice would afford them, and which both in respect of the Intensity and Duration, infinitely exceed the most profuse Sensualities the World ever tasted.



8. These are Interests that are sure important enough, and yet we must be wooed to consider them, nay, that does not prevail neither, but with a perverse Coyneſs we hold off; all the Solicitations and importunate Calls of God are looked upon as Artifices and Deligns, as if he had some Ends of his own to serve upon us, and (as the *Corinthians* suspected St. Paul) meant to make a Gain of us; we treat with him as if he were the Person to be advantaged, and barter for Heaven with such an Indifference, as if it would want us more than we it; never considering, that it is impossible for him to have any other Concern, than that which his Compassion to us creates, and the more earnest and passionate that is, the more it should excite our own Care, it being the extremest Degree of perverse Folly, to abandon and despise our own Interest, merely because a Friend or Patron considers and prizes it. And this Brand must lie upon every one of us, who still refuse to discern *the things that belong to our peace*, after God has done so much to render them not only visible but attainable.

9. What shall I say more, but conclude with Christ's passionate Wish, that we might, *in this our day, understand the things that belong to our peace*; and O that the Spirit of Peace and Light would descend among us, illuminate us with that true practical Wisdom, which may convince us, that our Duty and Interest are the same thing under several Forms, and that while we impiously cast off the one, we do as foolishly betray the other; that so those inestimable Advantages our Christianity gives towards both, may not be thus madly lost, serve only as a price in the hand of a fool, who hath no heart to it, *Prov. xvii.* And to this End, let us humbly and earnestly invoke the Father of Lights,  
to

to illuminate all those whom the God of this World hath blinded, that after he hath sent into the World the Image of his own eternal Brightness, caused the Sun of Righteousness so long to shine upon us, it may not serve only to involve us in that most dreadful Condemnation, which awaits those who love Darkness more than Light; but that answering the Purpose of our holy Calling, walking as Children of Light, we may vindicate that Christian Profession which we have so defamed, secure to ourselves the Light of God's Countenance here, and that of his Glory hereafter.

F I N I S.

PRIVATE

## PRIVATE DEVOTIONS,

Referring to the  
Several Parts of the before-going Treatise.

To the READER.

**I**T is to be hoped, that as this Treatise has entertained many, it has also had an Effect much more desirable, though less comprehensive, to mend and convince some. And whilst it gave an Account of the general Decay of Christian Piety, in the present Age, has also invited a few, at least, to its Pursuit and Service. Upon these Hopes the Author has been persuaded to add this short Specimen of Private Devotions, that, if the sober and considering Reader shall, at any time, find his Heart touched and softened, he may have in readiness wherewith to actuate his holy Flames, and assist him in his Addresses to the Throne of Grace.

**O** Blessed Lord, who art infinitely holy and happy in thyself, and from whom alone we derive the Possibilities of being either ; we prostrate ourselves before thee, in an humble Adoration of thy abundant Goodness, and a just Confusion at our own detestable Ingratitude : We were Aliens and Enemies to thee by our corrupt Affections, and ungodly Works, yet even to us hast thou been reconciled, nay bought the Atonement with the precious Blood of thy dear Son : Thou hast sent him to be the Propitiation for our Sins, and (which is no less Mercy) to be the Subduer of them too ;  
sentest

sentest him, by his divine Example and admirable Precepts, to bless us in turning every one of us from his Iniquities. Thou hast given us a Law so perfect, so excellent, as renders our Obediences their own Reward, and yet superaddest also an eternal Weight of Glory to be its future Retribution : And lest our brutal Temper should not be attracted by all this, thou hast hedged up our Way with Thorns, annexed a present Uneasiness, and subsequent Danger to our Deviations, so by the Menaces of Hell essaying to fright us into Heaven : And to actuate and enliven all these Methods, thou addest the internal Assistances of thy Grace and Spirit to excite us to Good, to restrain and avert us from Ill, and finally advance us to the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ. And now, O Lord, after all these Obligations, all these Aids, what Manner of Persons ought we to be, in all holy Conversation and Godliness ? But, alas, to our eternal Reproach, we have signalized ourselves by contrary Practice, blasphemed that holy Name whereby we are called, and by our enormous Lives, scandalized our Profession, and made it as eminent for Vice, as it should have been (and once was) for Virtue. Our Knowledge of thy Will serves only to inform us, wherein we may most oppose it ; and while we call ourselves Christians, we commit such Things as are not so much as named among the Gentiles. Nay, O Lord, so little do we retain of the Power of Godliness, that the greatest Part of Men have now cast off the very Form, deny the Lord that bought them, trample upon all that is sacred, and not only think, but loudly say, there is no God. Thus, instead of regulating our Manners by our Faith, we model our Faith by our Manners, and reap nothing by our Christianity, but the Guilt of Apostasy, and the fearful Expectation of that fiery Indignation



which awaits those who have thus trampled under Foot the Son of God, and done Despite to the Spirit of Grace. And now, O Lord, when the Foundations are cast down, what can the Righteous do? What Counterpoise can the Groans and Tears of those few who mourn in *Sion*, be to such general, such daring Impieties? Yet, O God, thou hast in all Ages strangely condescended to the Intercession of thy Servants. O bow thy Heaven again and come down, and hear the Prayers of those who desire to fear thy Name: And let them not only deliver their own Souls, but obtain Mercy for this perverse Generation, even such a mighty Grace as may yet reduce us. O thou who didst at first call us out of Darkness into thy marvellous Light, recal us now from that worse Darkness, wherein we have involved ourselves, put thy Laws anew in our Hearts, and write them in our Minds: And after so many Years, so many Ages of being called Christians, let us at last begin to be so. Revive, O Lord, that primitive Zeal and Sanctity, which may purify us to thyself a peculiar People zealous of good Works. And O thou blessed Mediator, who prayedst for thy first Crucifiers, intercede also for us, who have, under the Name of Disciples, crucified thee afresh: And though we have nothing to say for ourselves, cannot pretend that we knew not what we did; yet let thy Stripes and Wounds, thy Cross and Passion plead for us. Thou didst once lead Captivity captive, O stir up thy Strength again, and let not Satan now triumph in thy Spoils, and desecrate thy Church which thou hast purchased with thine own Blood. O let thy blessed Spirit breath again upon us, that even these dry Bones may live in thy Sight: Let him so effectually convince and reprove, illuminate and excite us, that we may cleanse ourselves from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit,

Spirit, walk worthy of that holy Vocation where-  
with we are called, and be capable of those glorious  
Rewards which are prepared for those who fight a  
good Fight, finish their Course, and keep the Faith ;  
where we shall cease to grieve, to suffer, and to sin,  
but never cease to live and to be happy, singing  
perpetual Hallelujahs to him that sits upon the  
Throne, to the Holy Spirit, and to the Lamb for  
evermore.

A L I T A N Y.

**O** GOD the Father of Heaven, the God of  
Angels and of Men, the Father of Compassions,  
of Consolation and Life ;

*Have Mercy upon us miserable Sinners.*

O God the Son, the eternal well-beloved Son,  
by whom the sinful Race of Men become the Sons  
of God ;

*Have Mercy upon us, &c.*

O God the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Comfort,  
of Holiness and Grace, by whom we receive the A-  
doption, and the Earnest of our Hope ;

*Have Mercy upon us, &c.*

Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, distinguished  
as in Person, so in the various Dispensations of the  
Work of our Redemption, united as in Essence, so  
in the Acts of Kindness and Compassion to Men ;

*Have Mercy upon us, &c.*

That it may please thee to create in us clean  
Hearts, and to renew a right Spirit within us, to  
rescue us from all the Deceits of the World, the  
Devil and our own Hearts.

*We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

That it may please thee to grant that all who  
have been baptized into Christ, may indeed put on  
Christ ; seriously weigh, and industriously answer  
the Obligation of their holy Calling ; not rest in the

Form and Outside of Religion, whilst by a wretched Inconsideration they enervate the Power and Efficacy thereof.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee so to guide our Consideration, that we do not thereby so ensnare ourselves, entertain those Delusions which flatter us with Hopes of Reward, without performing Duty ; but that, by an impartial Advertency to all thy sacred Dictates, we may be engaged to a constant entire Obedience, and work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to open our Eyes that we may see the wondrous Things of thy Law, to convince us that it is holy, just and good, sweeter than Honey and the Honey-comb, and that all our Objections to it arise only from our being carnal and sold under Sin.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to remove all our carnal Prejudices and vicious Prepossessions ; and to enable us to measure thy Precepts by the Rules of right Reason, and an illuminated Conscience, according to the Analogy of thy holy Faith once delivered to the Saints.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to inspirit us by thy Grace, that we may not only approve but obey thy Commands, conquer all the Discouragements of Sloth or Vice, and chearfully set to the Practice of Christian Duty, that so we may experimentally find how sweet the Lord is.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to put thy Fear in our Hearts, that we may never depart from thee, but equally obey thee in all things, not indulging to any  
favourite

favourite Sin, but entirely resign and captivate every Thought to the Obedience of Christ.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to take these stony Hearts out of us, and to give us Hearts of Flesh; such as may melt at the Apprehension of our Sins and thy Displeasure.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to endue us with a right Judgment, that we deceive not ourselves with Shews and Formalities of Repentance; but bring forth indeed Fruits meet for it.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to awake us from our supine and dangerous Dependence on a future Repentance, and make us, in this our Day, discern and embrace the Things belonging to our Peace, so answering thy present Calls, that we may not, at last, call when thou shalt only laugh at our Calamity, and mock when our Fear cometh.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to possess our Souls with a just Reverence, and right Apprehensions of thy Essence and Attributes, that we may not form our Belief of thee by our own Fancies or Wishes, but by those Revelations thou hast given of thyself in thy Word.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to restrain our bold Curiosity in prying into thy Counsels and Decrees, and make us wise unto Sobriety, reserving secret things unto the Lord our God, and studying the revealed ones for the regulating of our Lives.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to give us such an Awe of thy Justice, that we may fear to provoke it, not expecting thou shouldst repent of thy Judgments,



when we do not of our Sins, nor fancying that any milder Vengeance attends our final Obstinacy than unquenchable Fire.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to grant us such a Sense of thy Mercy, that we may never say there is no Hope, or excuse our Incurribleness by our Desperation, but that the Goodness of God may lead us to Repentance, yet let us never so presume on it, as to sin that Grace may abound.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to enable us with all due Regard to observe, and Humility to adore, the Dispensations of thy Providence, not pretending to fathom thy secret Intendments, but endeavouring so to comply with all signal Discoveries of thy Purposes towards us, that what thou designest for our Wealth, may not be to us an Occasion of Falling.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee, that from every Event, whether National or Personal, we may still infer the Obligation and Necessity of turning from our Sins; that Gratitude for past Mercies may allure us to Good, and Fear of impending Judgments may drive us from Evil.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to inspire the universal Church with the Spirit of Truth, Unity, and Concord, that there may be no Divisions among us; but that we may be perfectly joined together, in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee, whereinssoever any are contrary minded, to reveal thy Truth to them; and, in the interim, so to allay those Heats our Differences have caused, that, amidst the Diversi-  
ties

ties of Judgment, we may keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to deliver us from all the unhappy Effects of our Contentions, and to purge us from all the criminous Causes of them, and so to heal our Breaches, that *Jerusalem* may again become a City at Unity in itself.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

That it may please thee to grant that we no longer dote about Questions and Strifes of Words, whereof cometh Envy, Railing, evil Surmises; but so busy ourselves in practick Duties, that we may not fear, when our Lord comes, to be found so doing.

*We beseech thee, &c.*

Son of God we beseech thee to hear us.

O Lamb of God that takest away the Sins of the World;

*Grant us thy Peace.*

O Lamb of God that takest away the Sins of the World;

*Have Mercy upon us.*

O Christ hear us.

*Lord have Mercy upon us.*

*Christ have Mercy upon us.*

*Lord have Mercy upon us.*

**O**UR Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name, &c.

O Lord deal not with us after our Sins.

*Neither reward us after our Iniquities.*

**A**Lmighty God, who shewest to them that be in Error the Light of thy Truth, to the intent that they may return to the Way of Righteousness: Grant unto all them that be admitted to the Fellowship

lowship of Christ's Religion, that they may eschew those Things which be contrary to their Profession, and follow all such Things as are agreeable to the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**O** Merciful Saviour, who so lovedst thy Church, as to give thyself for her, look again on her with thy compassionate Eyes, who now needs a second Redemption, even a Rescue from herself, from the unnatural Issue of her own Bowels. Lord, thou seest the miserable State to which she is reduced, by our wild Contentions, that she has, at once, lost her Purity, and her Peace, and is become an *Aceldama*, a Field of Blood. Lord, where is thy Pity, and the Sounding of thy Bowels towards her, are they restrained? O remember thy old Loving-kindness, the Love of thy Espousals, and as thou wert once a Lamb to expiate her Guilt, so be thou now a Lion to vindicate her Wrongs; strike a Dread into the Hearts of all, who have contributed to her Ruin, and make them know, that whoso touches her, toucheth the Apple of thine Eye. O let not her still sink under the Oppression of our fordid Designs, and irregular Appetites, nor be devoured by those who pretend to guard her. Give her Pastors after thine own Heart; let her Priests be cloathed with Righteousness, and wash their Hands in Innocence before they compass thine Altar. O let not any vain Ambition for themselves, make them expose and prostitute the Honour of their God: No Affectation of that Knowledge which puffeth up, divert them from that Charity which only edifieth: Grant that the Interest of Religion may still be uppermost in their Hearts, and never vail to secular Ends, nor the Pretence of Truth cloak any exorbitant Passion. Nay, O Lord, refine even their Zeal, and make it serve to kindle,  
not

not consume their Charity : And to inspirit them with such an unwearied Industry, that they may always abound in the Work of the Lord, diligently take heed to those Flocks, over whom the Holy Ghost has made them Overseers, never turning aside to vain Jangling, or striving about Words to no Profit. And to all who are under their Charge, give Meekness to submit to those who, by thy Appointment, watch their Souls ; suppress all Prejudices and Faction, and let none be puffed up for one against another, but grant that by a due Attendance on their Callings, both as Men and Christians, they may lead a quiet and peaceable Life, in all Godliness and Honesty. And, Lord, let both Priest and People so follow after the Things that make for Peace, that we may adorn the Doctrine of our God and Saviour, take off the Scandal our Divisions have given to those that are without, and again evidence our Relation to the Prince of Peace : And O that our Ways were made thus direct, but, alas, how little Disposition have we towards it ? This Change must be only the Work of that mighty Power, which is able to subdue all things to itself : And yet, O Lord, with what Face can we beg of thee to force us to that Happiness, which we still resolve to resist ? What can we then say unto thee, O thou Preserver, thou Redeemer of Men, who have put ourselves beyond all the ordinary Methods of thy Grace ? We can only lay ourselves at thy Feet, display our Misery, and leave thee to consider thine own Compassion : O let that move thee to do for us whatever our wretched Estate is in need of ; O Lord hear, O Lord forgive, consider and do it, if not for ours, yet for thy Name's sake : Thou art Jesus, a Saviour, save thy People from their Sin, and let us not slide back by a perpetual Back-sliding ; thou art the Head of the Church, O  
abandon



abandon not thy Body : Carest thou not that she perish ? Turn thee again, O Lord, renew her Days as of old, sanctify and cleanse her, that thou mayest again present her to thyself a glorious Church, not having Spot or Wrinkle, and if she must still be militant, let it no longer be within herself, but against spiritual Wickednesses, the Ruler of the Darknes of this World, till at last thou utterly beat down Satan under her Feet, and translate her from this State of Warfare to that of Triumph and Bliss in the Kingdom of thy Father, which thou, O blessed Jesus hast purchased with thy Blood, and sealed by thy Spirit. To which blessed Trinity be ascribed all Praise, Honour, and Glory, now and for ever. Amen.

**O** Most gracious Lord, who, out of thy boundless Compassion to thy Creatures, art never wanting in any Means that may draw them to thyself, we the unworthiest of them desire to give glory to thee, in a hearty Acknowledgment that thou hast, in a most eminent and peculiar Manner, abounded to us of this Nation, afforded us all the Methods that might either force or allure us to Obedience. Lord, thou wert pleased to keep us many Years under thy chastening Hand, thou broughtest us into the Snare and laidest Trouble upon our Loins, and didst at once upbraid and punish our voluntary Slaveries to our own Lusts, by giving us up a Prey to those of others : And when those Judgments which should have melted, served but to harden us ; when we seemed emulous to have our Sins outvie thy Plagues, as they had before thy Mercies, what could we then expect, but to find a Judgment worthy of God ? Such an irreversibile Ruin as might render us an Hissing and Astonishment to the whole Earth ? But when we were thus ripened

ripened for thy greatest Severity, then didst thou, O Lord, prevent us with the Blessings of thy Goodness, miraculously interpose for our Rescue, and by such undiscernible Ways return the Captivity of our *Sin*, that we were delivered like them that dream. This, O Lord, was so stupendous, so amazing a Mercy, that nothing can be more admirable, but only our prodigious Ingratitude: Thou hast signally attested thyself to be a God that doest Wonders, and yet we who enjoy the Benefit of them, neither consider them as Wonders, nor thee as God, but atheistically defy that Providence by which we subsist. Thou hast restored to us our solemn Worship, and we now say, What a Weariness is it? can seldom afford it our Presence, and seldomer our Hearts. Thou hast broken the Yoke of usurping Oppressors, and we murmur no less at our lawful Governors, as if all that we desired to reap by the Exchange, were the Guilt of speaking evil of Dignities. Thou hast freed us from the Burden of unlawful imposed Oaths, and we daily rend thy sacred Name by voluntary impertinent ones. Thou hast delivered our Estates from the Rapine of others, and we sacrifice them to our own Riot, and are never the more open-handed to our poor Brethren for all thy Munificence to us. Thou hast restored us the Liberty of our Persons, and we proclaim Licence to our Lusts. These are the degenerate and base Returns we have made; thus, O thus have we requited the Lord, and by it have again forced thee to resume thy Scourge, and by a Succession of signal Judgments attest thy Displeasure. And yet, O Lord, who regardeth the Power of thy Wrath? Who is there that repenteth him of his Ways, or saith, What have I done? Never any Soil made so ill Return to so much Husbandry, and since we bring forth nothing but Briars and Thorns, we may surely conclude

clude we are nigh unto Cursing : And, O Lord, what can we plead to avert the Sentence, who are as far from Penitence as Innocence, or how can we pray against that Vengeance, which we make it our Business to pull down ? Nay, O Lord, shouldst thou as miraculously prolong, as thou didst restore our Peace, yet what will that avail us, if it serve but to set us at greater Hostility with thee ? Blessed Lord, there is but one Mercy that we are capable of, and that is the melting our Hearts, and if that cannot be done, but by casting us into a yet more fiery Furnace ; Lord, do that or any thing with us, so we may come out Vessels of Honour meet for thy Service. But yet, O Lord, if thy gentler Methods may have any Effect, be pleased to continue thy Long-suffering ; and though we have no Pretence to Mercy, yet do thou assert thine own Work, be merciful because thou hast been so, and suffer us not to destroy what thou hast so miraculously preserved. Finally, O Lord, dispense to us whatsoever thou seekest most apt to reduce us ; and that thy outward Applications may be no longer in vain, enforce and enliven them with thy inward ; and by the sweet Insinuations of thy blessed Spirit, subdue our obstinate Perverseness ; and give us at last such Grace as we may not turn into Wantonness. O thou to whom all things are possible, who hast done such wonderful things for us, work a yet greater Miracle in us, and of a profane, ungrateful, licentious Nation, make us an holy People unto thyself, that all Ranks and Conditions of Men, may as universally and industriously combine to propitiate, as they have to provoke thee ; that so by bringing forth Fruits of Repentance, we may escape thy Wrath, both temporal and eternal. Grant this for his Sake who died to work that Deliverance for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

